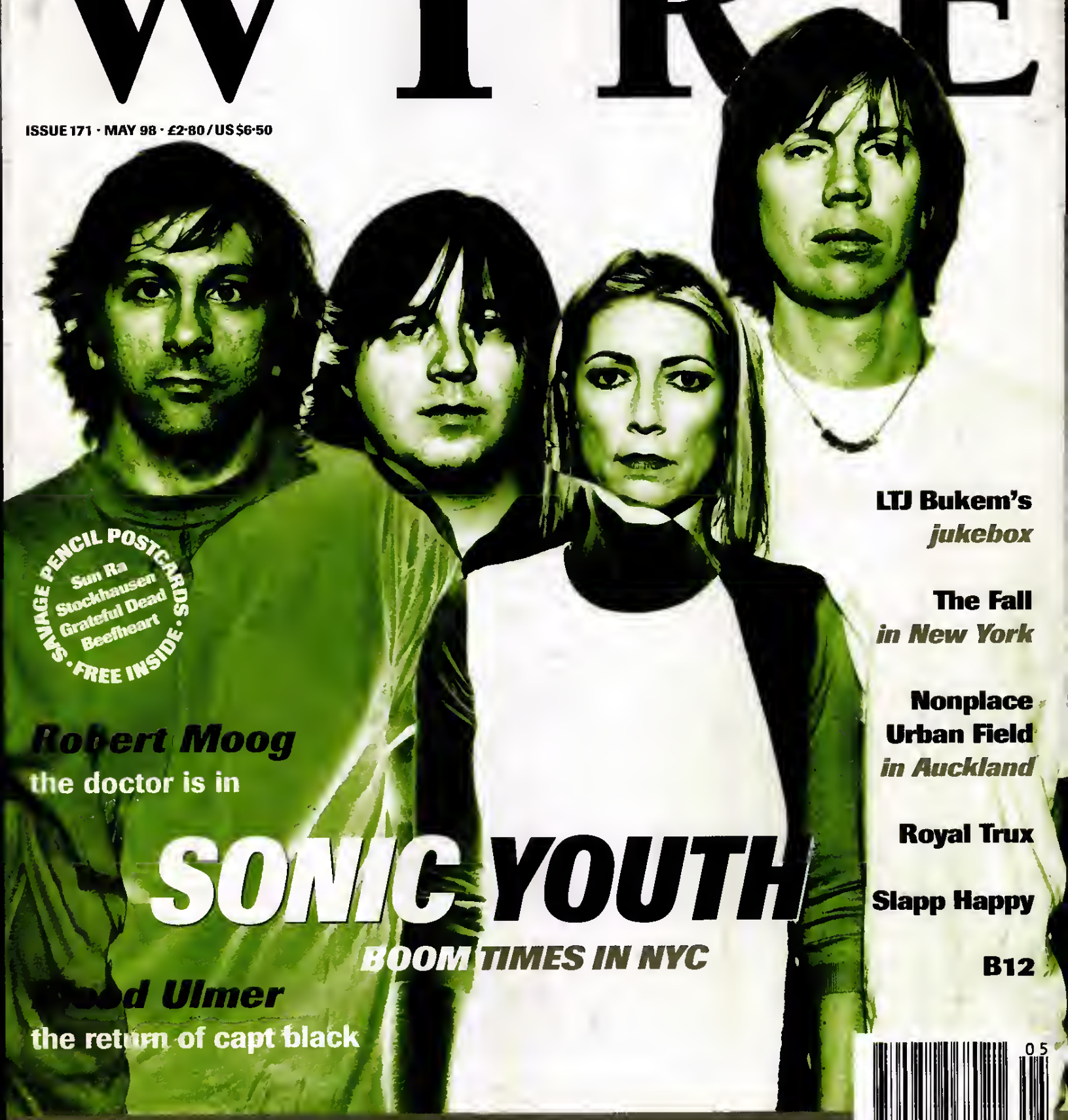
THE WIRE
ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC
ISSUE 171 · MAY 98 · £2·80 / US $6·50



SAVAGE PENCIL POSTCARDS
Sun Ra
Stockhausen
Grateful Dead
Beefheart
• FREE INSIDE •

Robert Moog
the doctor is in

SONIC YOUTH
BOOM TIMES IN NYC

Wood Ulmer
the return of capt black

LTJ Bukem's *jukebox*

The Fall *in New York*

Nonplace Urban Field *in Auckland*

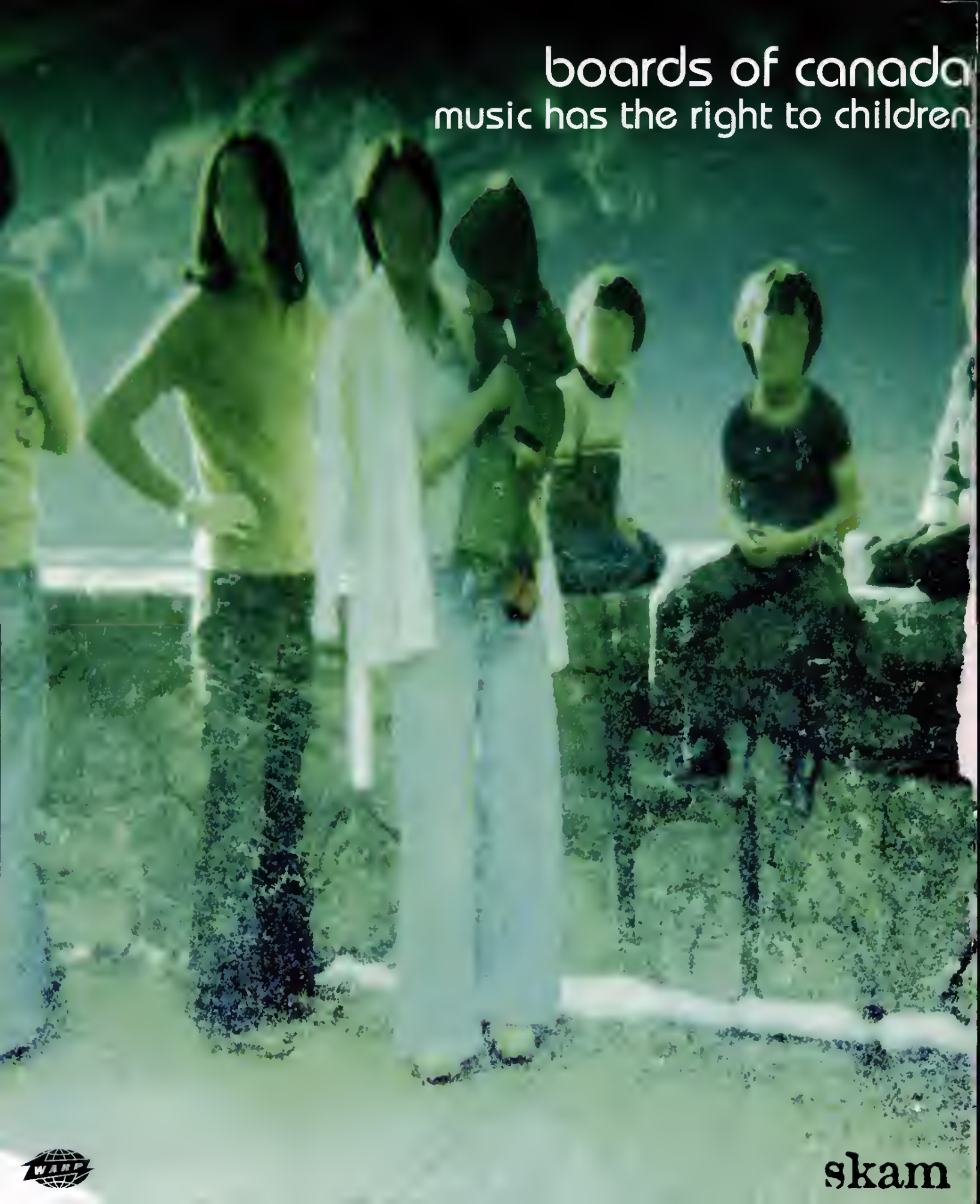
Royal Trux

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ELECTRONICA • AVANT ROCK • BREAKBEAT • JAZZ • MODERN CLASSICAL • GLOBAL


boards of canada
music has the right to children
skam

inside

your monthly exploration of new music

10 Hurdy-Gurdy Madness
Clive Bell gets a handle on the crankiest medieval instrument of all

12 Bites
B12 Techno by numbers **Kato Hideki** Back to bass **Mass** Power trio politics **Solex** Girl with a sampler
Fast track: Slapp Happy Label lore: Kitty-Yo Int

18 Global Ear: Tokyo
Rob Young goes shopping for music in the Japanese capital, and enters a culture-shocking world of customised cassettes, vinyl exotica, and virtual DJs

20 The Secret History of Film Music
In a time when movies are treated as marketing devices for CD compilations, Philip Brophy hails the narrative-enhancing use of records in the films of Martin Scorsese and Michael Mann

22 James Blood Ulmer
Is there still a place in the world for hardcore harmolodic punk-jazz? This legendary New York guitarist thinks so, and Steve Holtje agrees with him

26 Sonic Youth
The four members of the world's most influential rock group since The Velvet Underground get together in New York City, and give Biba Kopf a lesson in how to grow old disgracefully

34 Robert Moog
When Walter Carlos released *Switched-On Bach* in 1969, the sound of music was changed forever Mark Sinker meets the man who invented the instrument that made it all possible the Moog synthesizer

42 Invisible Jukebox: LTJ Bukem
The oceanic Junglist enters our mysterious listening booth, and tries to identify tracks by Leroy Hutson, Pharoah Sanders, Wax Doctor, Double Dee & Steinski and more Tested by Peter Shapiro

46 Royal Trux
Once they were strung out rock 'n' roll casualties Today, avant rock's First Couple speculate on the stock market, and espouse the universal music theories of Ornette Coleman By Louise Gray

reviews

51 Soundcheck May's selected albums and 12"s, including new releases from Boards Of Canada, Luc Ferrari, Ice, Khaled, Joe and Mat Maneri, Merzbow, Jeff Mills, Money Mark, Bernard Parmegiani, Arvo Part, Plastikman, Pulp, The Raincoats, Sonic Youth, Soft Machine and more **68 Multimedia** Sounding out new CD-ROMs **70 On Location** Going live The Fall come apart in NYC, East meets West at London's ICA, Improv antics north of the border, Electronica comes to New Zealand, David Thomas's near-disastrous Disastodrome **74 Print Run** New music books. Kodwo Eshun's adventures in sonic fiction, England's green and silent land, The story of soul power, Musicians on the couch

4 Editorial **6 Soundings** May's selected live events, festivals, happenings, club spaces and radio
8 Letters **50 Charts** **80 Back Issues** **81 Subscribe** and get a FREE Robert Wyatt CD
82 Epiphanies Thurston Moore grows a weird beard



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ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC

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editor's idea

"Detonated in the controlled conditions of your room," writes Kodwo Eshun on page 171 of *More Brilliant Than The Sun*, his mind-fucking 200 page odyssey through the unmapped domain of black sonic fiction, "Energy Music is a mind, body and soul bomb that melts down psychic armour"

Kodwo isn't referring to Energy Music in general, that sub-stratum of 60s free jazz which attempted to turn the cast iron templates of black music into a lung-powered interstellar starship, instead, he is formulating an appropriate response to the last recordings of The John Coltrane Orchestra (as he brilliantly describes the group of musicians which Coltrane gathered around him in the two years leading up to his death in July 1967)

Perhaps it was reading the four paradigm-exploding pages devoted to Coltrane's final days in Kodwo's book that did it, but these past two weeks, The John Coltrane Orchestra is the only music I have wanted to hear

During this period, I have been carrying with me the documents left by the Orchestra like they were holy scriptures, scrutinising the sleevenotes, plotting the sequence of recording dates, tracking the Orchestra's passage as it drifted down the East and West Coasts of America between June 1965 (the recording of *Ascension*) and February 1967 (the recording of *Interstellar Space*), and over the Pacific Rim into Tokyo and beyond And I am left with an impression of the Orchestra as a band of dusty, sonic itinerants, heads buzzing with a revelatory spectrum of frequencies and tone-colours, putting down in makeshift temples (aka recording studios and night clubs) for extended ceremonials of cosmic communion, then moving on, the soul bomb planted, primed, and now detonating 30 years into the future

Listening to the hours of music collected on *The Major Works* ("Om", "Selflessness", Editions I and II of "Ascension"), the private tapes unearthed for *Cosmic Music*, the live recordings documented on the two CDs of *Live In Seattle*, the single disc *Live At The Village Vanguard Again* and the four CDs of *Live In Japan* (these latter two with a new group featuring Alice Coltrane and Rashied Ali), as well as the duets with Ali captured on *Interstellar Space*, and the posthumously augmented symphonies of *Infinity*, I am overtaken by the idea that 95 per cent of all the music that has emerged since these performances were burned onto tape is a joke by comparison

In the controlled conditions of my living room, the "holy noise" of The John Coltrane Orchestra scrambles the brain, works its way through the skin over impossibly long durations, cleans out the synapses, agitates the nervous system into a hypersensitive receiver of profound information As Kodwo writes, under the fingers of the Orchestra, "Energy Music entails an awakening of the world flooded the barriers of cool until emotion gushed becomes Universal Sound which makes audible the cosmic order, forhears the masterplan in an act of clairaudience"

And you thought it was just jazz

This is my 50th issue as editor of *The Wire*, and I was intending to use this space to reflect on some of the music that has animated the magazine during that four year span — but prolonged exposure to the afterburn of The John Coltrane Orchestra has momentarily derailed all rational thought. Suddenly, I have to resist the urge to reduce all the music that has filled these pages over the last 50 issues to just two categories. If it isn't flying into The Eye Of The Storm, then it is merely Pissing In The Wind

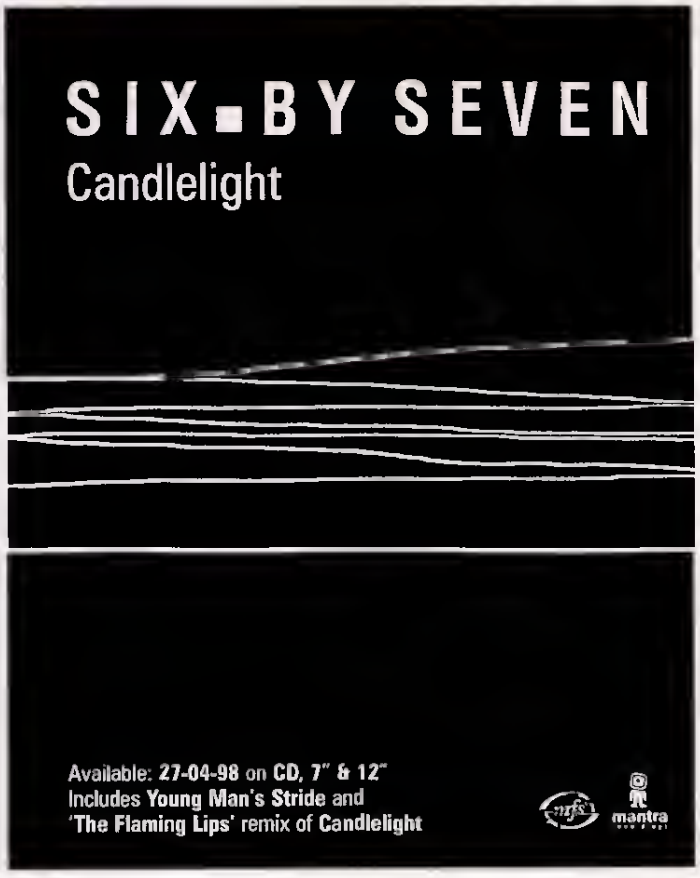
Perhaps in a few days time such a judgement will feel like a rash promise made during an unstable psychic state But right now, this music does indeed flood the barriers of cool until emotions gush

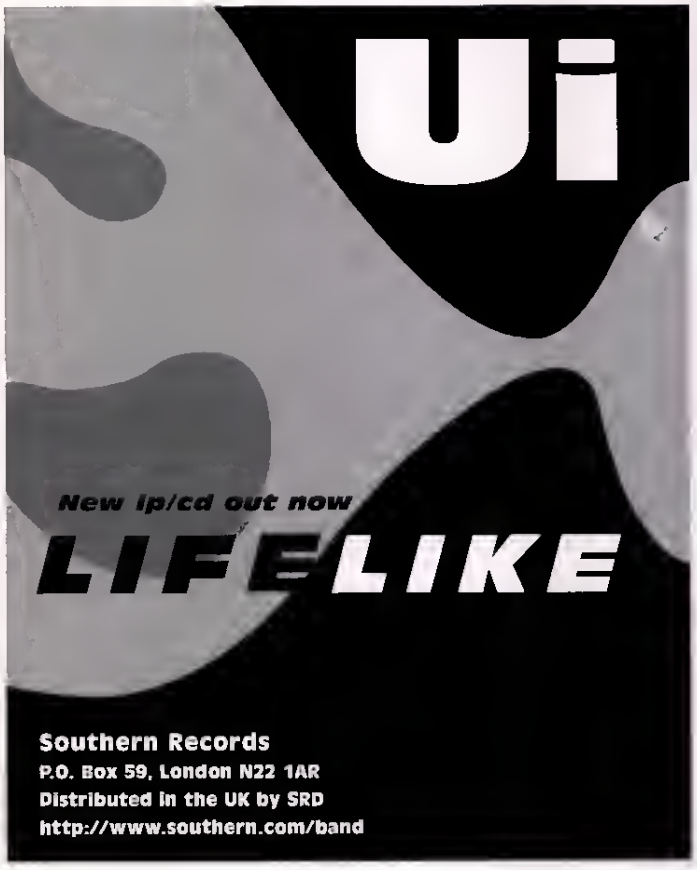
From the sublime to the materialist with this issue, the price of *The Wire* goes up from £2 50 to £2 80, the first rise in the magazine's cover price since January 1994 Needless to say we regret having to make such an increase, but rising costs in the monthly production of the magazine have finally forced our hand By way of compensation, we will be keeping the price of a year's subscription down at the old rate of £30 for 12 issues for the next three months. yet another incentive to subscribe now to the only music magazine in the entire cosmos that sets out to make a difference **TONY HERRINGTON**

The June issue of *The Wire*
Picking up more fevered transmissions from the outer reaches of the sonic cosmos
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soundings may

Selected highlights of the month's live events, happenings, club spaces and broadcasts

Festivals/Special Events



PHOTO: SABRINA HARRISON

LMC 7th Annual Festival The major UK experimental music event of the summer, this year's London Musicians' Collective three-dayer (22-24 May) brings some of the big names in drone Minimalism to London's South Bank Centre. Cuddly Charlemagne Palestine kicks off, supported by ROVA Saxophone Quartet (new commissions of Barry Guy and Lindsay Cooper), Stefan Jaworzyn & Alan Wilkinson Duo, and performance artist Anne Wellmer (22). 23 Deep Listening with Pauline Oliveros, Paul Rutherford's 22 piece Ikrastra (with Evan Parker, Louis Moholo, Howard Riley and others), Berlin trumpeter Axel Dorner, and a rendition of Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning, Paragraph 7*, directed by Michael Parsons. 24 Digital dementia from Mego's Fennesz, Pita and Panasonic's Mika Vainio, Paul Lovens & Thomas Lehn, Chris Burn Ensemble, and Les Diaboliques (with Maggie Nicols, Irene Schweizer and Joëlle Léandre). London South Bank Centre, 22-24 May, 7pm, £12/£8 (season ticket £30/£20), 0171 960 4242

Universe 98 Two days that promise to be the largest outdoor weekend dance event of the year, with a stage for every planet in the solar system. Among scores of mainstream dance acts are a cluster of names that fall into *The Wire*'s orbit. 23 May (midday-6am) Plastikman, Roni Size Reprazent, Spiritualized, Model 500, Red Snapper, Kool Keith, Sofa Surfers, Steve Stoll and Fluke play live. DJs Howie B, James Lavelle, Gilles Peterson, Robert Hood, Jeff Mills, Stacey Pullen, Surgeon and more. 24 (1-11pm) Beck, Tricky, Rakim, Air Liquide, Autechre, Earthtribe, Joi, Plaid, State Of Bengal live. DJs DJ Cam, J Saul Kane, Fabio, Mickey Finn, Groovender, DJ Hype, Kenny Ken, Randall, Marshall Jefferson, Dego, Kirk Degiorgio, DIY Sound System, Joey Beltram, Carl Cox, Matthew Hawtin & Clark Warner (Plus 8). Plus all day programmes of comedy, films, poetry and storytelling, circus, multimedia/Internet zone, skateboarding, percussion pyramid, masseurs and sundry extra sidewhows. Hertfordshire Knebworth Park, 23-24 May, £60 (includes camping and parking), ticket line 0115 912 9129, info 0839 444572

Brighton Fringe Festival Under the banner of the Fringe, which runs from 2-25 May, two music events are worth noting. Brighton Crawl (2 May) fills the town's pubs and clubs with a host of underground acts including Pram, Fridge, Kreidler, Hood, Plone, Movietone, Buffalo Daughter, Bis, Hefner, Novak, Magoo, Jad Fair, Subtropic, Osymyso and many more (at various venues around the seafront, info 01273 673850). Meanwhile, Pioneers Of Electronic Music (20-26 May) is a mini-festival spotlighting vintage electronic sounds and film music of the 50s and 60s together with more contemporary works. Live music comes from Zoviet*France, Tacet Ensemble, The Megatherm and Geiger Counter (22, Ray Tindle Centre). As well as screenings of movies like *Forbidden Planet*, there'll be listening sessions to electronic music by Tod Dockstader, Xenakis, Beaver & Krause, Pierre Henry, Stockhausen, White Noise and more, a talk from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, and a massed Stylophone procession through the streets of Brighton (23). All events take place at Brighton Cinematheque and Ray Tindle Centre, call 01273 384300 for full details

Kronos Festival Celebrating 25 years of existence, the trendy American string quartet best known for their championing of contemporary music occupy the Royal Festival Hall between 24-30 May. Themed programmes include 'Early Music' (24), 'Trains' (Steve Reich and Harry Partch, 27), 'The Rite Of Spring' (30), and 'Kronos For Children' (30, 2.30pm). All evening concerts begin at 8pm, £15-£7.50, booking on 0171 960 4242

Keep 8 Electroacoustics and visual art with John Grieve (new pipe organ installation), The Remote Viewers (Improv sax trio), Cedar Lewisohn (boxing, live violin), plus Robin Coe, Salome Voegelin, Jonathan Hodgson and more. London Roundchapel, 1d Glenarm Road, Lower Clapton Road, E5, 31 May, 7-11pm, £5/£4, 0181 986 1936 (*www.audioarts.com/keep*)

Musique Action 98 15th of these well known French New Music fests (14-24 May). The appearance of Tom Cora in several groups has been cancelled by the Improv cellist's recent, untimely death, but the show goes on with various appearances by Michel Doneda, Le Quan Ninh, Pascal Comelade, Phil Minton & Roger Turner, Alan Wilkinson & Stefan Jaworzyn, Kasper Toeplitz, Zeena Parkins, Otomo Yoshihide & Sachiko M, Jaki Liebezeit's Club Off Chaos, and Tim Hodgkinson and Chris Cutler teaming up with Romanian avant garde composer Iancu Dumitrescu. Vandoeuvre-Les-Nancy Centre Culturel André Malraux, 14-24 May, full ticket information 00 33 3 83 57 52 24, fax 00 33 3 83 53 21 85, e-mail *ccam@worldnet.fr*

Bath Jazz Weekend Highlights of this three day event include Paul Rutherford's Ikrastra (23), Les Diaboliques and Eberhard Weber (23), hurdy-gurdyist Valentin Clastner's trio (24), and Ernst Reijseger with Trio Clusone (24). Bath Pavilion & Guildhall, 22-24 May, times and prices vary, info 01225 463362

Impakt Festival Utrecht multimedia/electronic arts festival (13-17 May) which includes an embodiment of David Toop's concept of a globally networked *Spirit World*. For details, visit the Website *www.xs4all.nl/~impakt*

Sonar 98 Advance warning: Kraftwerk, Mouse On Mars and Jeff Mills headline the biggest line-up yet at the Barcelona new music/multimedia jamboree (18-20 June). For ticket/travel info, e-mail *sonar@sonar.es*, or visit the Sonar Website *www.sonar.es*

On Stage

Derek Bailey Launching the Improv guitarist's first new solo album in seven years. London Vortex, 10 May, 8pm, £6/£4, 0171 254 6516

Boukman Eksperyans Two nights of Haitian Voudou ceremonials and extended trance workouts led by Edgard Jean-Louis and his drummers, plus Boukman's ten piece rhythm unit. London Bagley's Studios, 15 May, 9pm-3am, £12/£10, 0171 344 0044, Liverpool Cream, Parr Street, 22 May, 9pm-2am, £9/£7.50, 0151 708 9979

Flaming Lips Oklahoma rock mavericks present their experimental show *Zaireeka*. 40 'celebrities' (including My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields, among others), each equipped with a ghetto blaster and prerecorded tape, follow directions as they contribute to this large scale Ambient symphony. London Forum, 16 May, £9.50, 0171 344 0044

Diamanda Galás Cathartic doomsong from the queen of the genre, playing material from her new album *Malediction And Prayer*. London RFH, 8 May, £tbc, 0171 960 4242

Philip Glass/Robert Wilson British premiere of *Monsters Of Grace*, a new three dimensional computerised opera staged with digital projections and based on the Sufi love poetry of 13th century mystic Rumi. London Barbican Theatre, 19-23 May, times/prices vary, 0171 638 8891

David Lang/Marty Ehrlich Trio Premiere of new composition *The Passing Measures* by the American Bang On A Can leader. Bass clarinettist Ehrlich's trio includes Mark Dresser (bass) and Andrew Cyrille (drums). Birmingham Adrian Boult Hall, 3 May, 7.30pm, £9/£5, 0121 236 5622

Lydia Lunch She's just released her latest album, *Matrikamantra*, on the appropriately titled Crippled Dick Records, and she's here in the flesh with a live group to promote it. London Garage, 17 May, £7.50, 0171 607 1818

John Lurie & The Lounge Lizards A five date tour of the UK from the smooth talking purveyor of downtown avant Americana. Brighton Theatre Royal (24 May), Salisbury Playhouse (26), Leeds Irish Centre (28), London QEH (29), Birmingham Adrian Boult Hall (30)

Pat Metheny Group Three night residency in West London for the multi-guitarist and his seven-piece ensemble including Lyle Mays and Paul Wertico. London Shepherd's Bush Empire, 8-10 May, 8pm, £17.50, 0181 740 7474

Royal Trux Tour dates for the Virginian vainqueurs. Brighton Concorde (13 May), London Garage (14), Manchester Hop & Grapes (15), Leeds Duchess Of York (16), and Glasgow 13th Note (17)

Siren Circus + Daniel Biro + John Palmer First of a monthly run of experimental music events hosted by the offbeat Sargasso label, including Siren Circus's otherworldy voices, Biro's haunting Rhodes sonatas and synth music by Palmer. London Union Chapel, 1 May, 8pm, £6/£4, 0171 226 1686

Tricky Returns to the stage for one of his penetrating, intense live shows. London Forum, 21 May, £11, 0171 344 0044

Club Spaces

2:13 Club Improv manoeuvres from Alan Wilkinson, Thebe Lipere, Oean Brodrick, Marcio Mattos and John Edwards London Library Gallery, Stoke Newington Church Street, N16, 2 May, 2 13pm, £4/£3, 0171 249 7937

Defunkt Cristian Vogel, Flack, Tobias Schmidt, Mat Consume, Jamie Lidell, Hardy Spymania, Milky Boy and Mat Yee King kick up a stink at this one-off contribution to the Brighton Fringe Festival Brighton Sound Gallery, Meeting House Lane, 7 May, 1pm-2am, £4/£3 50, 01273 704610

Disko-no Fundamentalist Electronica night with OJs Boards Of Canada, Manchester noise crew V/Vm, Stock, Hausen & Walkman, Alex Knight, Oave Cawley and Oavid Howell of Fat Cat Records Prepare to have conversation topics chosen for you and your records broken. Edinburgh Wilkie House, 24 May, 10pm-3am, £tbc, 01324 B15250

Electronic Lounge Robin Rimbaud and friends get totally Scannered London ICA, 5 May, 9pm-1am, £2 50/£2, 0171 49B 3032

Elsctronix Bank Holiday madness with a four hour set from Andrew Weatherall, and residents OJs Oaz Quayle and Nathan Buller Leeds Liquid, Central Road, 4pm-late, free (before 5pm), 0113 293 4666

ESP Beats, jazz, dub and Jungle *sans frontieres*, spun weekly by OJ Rob Lo London Koha Bar, 11 St Martin's Court, WC2, Saturdays 7-11pm, free

Floppy Disco Monthly gathering presented by OIY Communications and Filter Records This month Kid Loops, Sunship, OIY OJs and a large selection of OJs occupy three floors of East London's busiest venue London 333 Club, 333 Old Street, EC1, 15 May, 10pm-5am, £8/£5, 0171 739 5949

Global Sweatbox World Music crossings, with Tony Thorpe (Language) and Bobby Friction (13 May), and Up, Bustle & Out and Sam Gita (Loop Guru) (27) keeping their finger on the planet-wide pulse London Crossbar, fortnightly Wednesdays, 10pm-3am, £3/£2, 01B1 961 5490

Klinker Improvised jinks with Tim Hill/Steve Noble Trio (5 May), NYC's Ballistic Cabaret (19, half price), Marcio Mattos Quintet (26), Birdyak, Tad and Emmett (29) London The


Lydia Lunch at London Garage

Sussex, 107A Culford Road, N1, Tuesdays (except 29), B 30-11pm, £5/£3 Birdyak also play at London Trolley Stop, Stamford Road, N11 (19, 11pm, free) and The Victoria, 203 Holloway Road, N7 (21, B 30pm, free), all details on 01B1 B06 B216

Kosmische Popular monthly site of Kraut-inspired mayhem This month Horton Jupiter & The Joy Orsko Kollektiv perform live, plus OJing from Barry Smith (Add N To X) and Main's Robert Hampson Cabaret, visuals by Curious Yellow and rare German films are sideshow attractions London Upstairs at the Garage, 23 May, 9 30pm-3am, £5/£4, 0171 607 1B1B

Kosmische + Sausage Machine Co-presenting two further live events this month in East London Kraftwerk obsessives Komputer (14 May), and City Slang soundsmith Schneider™ (2B) London Vibe Bar, 91 Brick Lane, E1, Bpm-late, £5/£4, 0171 3BS 6171

Manga Vintage Junglist Ray Keith drops in to this Scottish breakbeat-fest. Edinburgh La Belle Angele, Hasties, nr Guthrie Street, 15 May, 11pm-3am, £7/£5, 0131 220 5575

Metalheadz Cutting edge breakbeat and drum 'n' bass spun by members of Jungle's magic circle Goldie, Fabio, Groovenider, Kemistry & Storm, etc London Blue Note, Sundays, 7pm-midnight, £8/£4, 0171 729 B440

PM Scientists From the packed confines of London's Smithfields, the two-person drum 'n' bass army are on the road, winding up in May at. Leeds It's Obvious at the Warehouse (1 May), Plymouth Jungle Fresh at the Cooperage (2), Galway Heineken Festival (3)

Psy-Phi This weekly HipHop/funk night features special guests from San Francisco this month Jurassic Five featuring the excellent Cut Chemist (14 May), and Peanut Butter Wolf plus MC Rasco (2B) Glasgow Sub Club, Jamaica Street, Thursdays, 11pm-3am, £4/£3, 0141 24B 4600

Purpose Maker For one fortnight only, Oetroit denizen Jeff Mills exhibits a selection of prints and photographs linked to his new *Purpose Maker* compilation London Global Cafe, 15 Golden Square, W1, 17-29 May, daily (closes midnight), free

Quadrafunk Funky backbeats old and new, with spinners Oave Clarke, Andrew Weatherall, Matt Herbert (aka Radioboy), Oave Hill and Jools Butterfield (Nuphonic), and resident Andrew Curley London Complex, 1-5 Parkfield Street, N1, 15 May, 10pm-5am, £tbc, 01B1 961 5490

Rsys Atmospheric engineering in the ICA Bar with this multimedia collective, along with OJs Kryptonite, Jaspar, Toona (Stealth), and visuals by OFuse and Auto-Pilot. London ICA, 15 May, B 30pm-1am, £2 50/£2, 0171 207 4094 (Website *www.c8.com/raya/*)

Scratch Live audio-visual theatre from Blue Planet artist Bowling Green Plus Barry Smith from Add N To X OJs from his exotic collection, and special headline act to be announced London Spitz, 21 May, 7 30pm-midnight, £6/£4, 0171 22B 6616

The Sprawl Rollicking rumpus from Ninja Tune's Animals On Wheels, plus live high-flying from Icarus (Hydrogen Oukebox) Resident OJs Si-[cut]-db and Bit Tonic fill in the gaps London Global Cafe, 15 Golden Square, W1, 14 May, 7 30pm-midnight, £3 50/£3, 0171 700 7569

Swaraj Classical popular, underground and subterranean fusions from the four corners of the earth, with OJs Pathaan, Bobby Friction and special guests live and on the decks London Blue Note, Mondays, 9pm-3am, £5/£3, 0171 729 B440

Tangent Eclectic mix at this Glaswegian fortnightly bash, ringmastered by A-Man and Panic (Glasgow Sub Club, Jamaica Street, 15 and 29 May) They're also celebrating Mayday with a special party on a train (2 May, secret location, tickets from Concrete Skates, Wilson Street, Glasgow)

The Wireless Breakbeat to Big Beat to downbeat to no beat at this weekly listening room. London Koha Bar, 11 St Martin'sCourt, WC2, Fridays, 7-11pm, free, 0171 420 5626

Radio

National

BBC Radio 1

Andy Kershaw *Mondays 8.40-10.30pm* World Music from all quarters folk, roots reggae and more
John Peel *Tuesdays-Thursdays 8.40-10.30pm* The best place to keep up with new rock. indie Techno, Jungle Electronica dub and the legendary sessions
One In The Jungle *Fridays 2-4am* Guest DJs provide hour-long breakbeat mix
Annie Nightingale *Sundays 4-6am* Chilled, eclectic sounds for the apres clubber

BBC Radio 3

Mixing It *Mondays 10.45-11 30pm* Eclectic rattlebag of new sounds hosted by Robert Sandall and Mark Russell with interviews sessions and CD reviews
Hear And Now *Fridays 10-12pm* Contemporary music magazine interviews, record reviews, sessions. This month Gamelan concert from Manchester ISCM Festival (1 May) BBC Singers at ISCM (B), Singing The Century (Kurtág, Mason, Colin Matthews, 15), Singing The Century Composers Ensemble (Donatoni, Grisey, Castiglioni 22) London Sinfonietta (Fedele. Murail, Del Tredici, 29)
World Music *Sundays 11 15-11 45pm* Ethnic explorations via field recordings This month *Playing In A Volcano* — four part series marking 50th anniversary of the State of Israel

Regional

BBC Derby

Soundscapes *Sundays 3-5pm* Ashley Franklin plays Instrumental Electronica, contemporary classical/systems music New Age and Ambient

BBC Greater London Radio (GLR)

Ross Allen *Wednesdays 8-10.30pm* TripHop, Techno, Electro, Big Beats and drum 'n' bass
Charlie Gillett *Saturdays 7-9pm* Rock, roots dub World Music, blues R&B and more

BBC Lancashire

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BBC Merseyside

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Soundings items for the June issue should reach us by ***Friday 8 May****. NB. clubs and venues out of London — we want to list your events! So let us know the whos, the whens and the wherefores*

letters

Write to: Letters, *The Wire*, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, or fax: 0171 287 4767, or e-mail *the_wire@ukonline.co.uk*. Please include a full name and address. Every letter published wins a FREE CD

Divine providence

While many major music magazines here in the States (both domestic and imported) might make small claim to cover some of the underground, fringe and lesser-known musical greats within their pages, it is overwhelmingly to the credit of *The Wire* to consistently provide not only lengthy and intelligently written articles plus reviews of the above artists within, but to constantly blow my mind by who it is that you put on your covers

Scanning the racks of the local booksellers, one almost always will find the typical high-profile musical faces, be it Oasis (again and again), The Beatles (times ten) or Pink Floyd, on the cover of one of the very respectable British monthly publications, or any number of the flavour-of-the-moment crap indie rockers adorning the American magazines

With *The Wire* I am instead lovingly treated to the likes of Robert Wyatt (at long last), Mark E Smith (a veritable Picasso of his medium), Can (everyone sings their praises, but ignores their faces), Jim O'Rourke (a very funny prince of the avant guitar) and even Nurse With Wound (thank you Lord!) Add to this any number of lesser known faces from the spectrum of jazz, Electronica or avant rock, and you have a magazine that defies the standard marketing strategy for the selling of that magazine

It took me half a year to get my bookseller to up his quantities of *The Wire* from three (gone within days, usually to their employees) to more than enough to supply all of us fans — it seems they just kept ordering more and more of that similarly monikered ghastly monster of an American computer monthly instead — ha ha Now there's plenty of copies of *The Wire* to go around Happy ending for all of us faithful readers here in Providence Thank you

Robert Jazz *Providence, Rhodes Island, USA*

Northern exposure

After reading this magazine for five long years (I live in Canada it's so cold that time slows down), I have finally decided to drop the various excuses I have for procrastinating (ie forgot to take my Ritalin!), and send you kind regards a) Great to see the Nurse With Wound article (*The Wire* 160), that piece shed lots of light onto a rather foggy corner of the soundworld (you never know if Steven's dead, or just isn't answering the phone), b) in a more general vein great magazine, consistent in your variety of artists, lucid reviews section — SPLAT CRASH sounds of struggle the sound of evil fingers using keyboard a demon/critique has appeared on the scene

AND ANOTHER THING! If you 'Brits' insist on using the word 'modern' in your little, uh, 'motto', then it would be nice to see some of the excesses of aural modernity! Maybe a piece about the only thing you could find in Canada that makes me smile the electroacoustic and acousmatic communities, both in Quebec and at the Banff Center Too hard for you to wrangle up an interview with Robert Normandeau or Paul Dolden? The Canadian ea/u communities are constructing and refining their methods (look at how John Oswald has played with the ideas of pastiche/fusion/collage) and are now years beyond 98 per cent of the crap advertised to me as 'experimental and modern'

Humorous Invisible Jukebox section, nice photos, and a writing team that makes *The Wire* 'fun fun fun' to read! Keep up the good work, kids, or I'll have to write again!

Alejandro Saldivar *Calgary, Canada*

Have a heart

Just a quick note to express my appreciation of David Keenan's Epiphanies article (*The Wire* 170). It would have to be one of the most profound, beautiful and touching pieces of journalism (of any description!) I've read in quite some time, and serves as a full vindication of the comments expressed in your Editonal. It's nice to know that *The Wire* recognises that music, even in its most challenging and iconoclastic form, has as much to do with the heart as with the head, and despite the best efforts of some of your readers (and writers!) can never become a pure exercise in intellectual analysis

John Marquis *Perth, Western Australia*

Magical history tour

At last, Captain Beefheart features in your mag (The Primer, *The Wire* 170). The master craftsman made two legendary records, *Lick My Decals Off, Baby* and *Trout Mask Replica*, which I believe will be the greatest music ever documented in the history of humanity I'd like to point out that the hairy arseholes (apart from Donald Van Vliet) pictured on page 48 are *not* a 'Magic Band', as captioned, but rather a bunch of session musicians Insulting to the real Magic Band to document them as such

Philip Duckworth *Chipstead, Surrey*

Good Fela

When I was in the eighth grade, on my walk home from school I would pass by a record store One day while flipping through the import stacks (in 1985 Southern California was getting over the second British invasion) in the midst of The Human League and Tears For Fears and whatnot was a stack of shrinkwrapped albums from an artist named Fela, called *Confusion* The art alone made me want to get it and at $1 99 I figured it was worth a shot.

When I got home and played it, I was in shock. The totality of the African diaspora was there in that one song I hunted down others and they were like little found postcards from one of the furthest points of the possibility of music from someone I didn't really know about. A special thanks to Lindsay Barrett (*The Wire* 169) for filling in the pieces of this friend who got me through many a year

Joseph Buck *Pasadena, USA*

Minimal requirement

In light of the recent and very exciting releases of *Early Minimalism* from Tony Conrad, and the discussion it has generated within your own pages (*The Wire* 168 and 170), I would love to read an article or interview featuring both Mr Conrad and John Cale It would be interesting to find out how Mr Cale regards the work of his former collaborator, and I am sure that *The Wire* could successfully encourage them both to join together in trying to fill in certain blanks in our musical heritage!

Anthony D Thompson *Pontefract, West Yorks*

For some insight into Cole's thoughts on Conrad, see his Invisible Jukebox in The Wire *151 — Ed*

Hollywood babble on

I challenge *Wire* readers to read any one of Philip Brophy's Secret History of Film Music instalments and see if they can get through his introductions with anything less than three readings Go ahead, grab some old issues and give it a try I must say that once I've weathered his precipitous 'discursive journeys' of verbose, dash-infested subcontexts, I quite enjoy his studies of the various influences on film music But how about this sentence "The narratological impulses crazily guiding a movie may be rendered thin and shallow by classical notions of myth or the purist ideals of the avant garde, but those impulses are astounding when gauged by modern and postmodern audio-visual perception." Uh, what was the subject again? Come on Phil, help me out a little here — *narratological*? Sounds like DJ Spooky's secret history of film music

Ben Shearer *Chicago, USA*

Corrections

Issue 170 The distributor for the All Saints label, as listed in last month's guide to *The Wire Topper* CD, should have been Vital, not Pinnacle In Soundcheck, ROIR is distributed by Shellshock not Plastic Head □



18. Thursday

LIVES. Kraftwerk, Coldcut, Pan Sonic, Porter Ricks, Hippaly, Digi Onze, Signal, Subsonic, Sloan, Tito & Suguru Goto
DJ'S: François Kevorkian, DJ Hell, Digs & Woosh D.J Y dj's, Dj Vadim, Francis 90, Ivan, TIK, Mouse Down Chelin, Dj Q Z, Brozoo, Dj Groux, Dave Tarrida, Dj 10 Sol
GLOBAL TEKNO/RADIO FG introduces: Ivan Smagghe, Arnaud Rebotini, Impulsion, I:Cube&Gilb-r

19. Friday

LIVES. Aux 88, Laurent Garnier, Les Rythmes Digitales, Certain Beyond All Reasonable Doubt, Farmers Manual, Maison Bricolage, Mell Aleen.
DJ'S: Deep Dish, Jack de Marseille, Junior Sánchez, Audio Polution, Mika Vainio, Potuznick.
SUBLIME introduces: Dj Wada, Max Brennan, Co-Fusion, Prism, Yamazaki
COSMOS introduces: Funk Empire, Lippo+Professor Angel Dust, Kosmos+Xavier Alarcón

20. Saturday

LIVES. Jimi Tenor's Tenorlandia, Neotropic, Sugar Experimental Station, Astrud, Evil Tunes
DJ'S: Jeff Mills, Surgeon, Claude Young, Ralph Lawson, Jay Denham, Purple Penguin, Nairobi Trio, Charlie Hall, Coco Steel & The Lovebomb, Dj Killer
COLOGNE / POPKOMM introduces: Club off Chaos, Dj Anima, Modernist & Dr Walker, Whirlpool Productions, Mathias Schaffhäuser, Mouse on Mars, Michael Mayer.
MINIFUNK introduces: Dj Angel Molina+Toon Marcianas, Full Duplex, Coltren, An Der Dj, Loe+Omar.

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TRUE GRIT

Clive Bell tries to get a handle on new approaches to the **hurdy-gurdy**, the crankiest of medieval instruments

"And hear the locust and the grasshopper/Their melancholy hurdy-gurdies play "

When Longfellow wrote these lines in 1863, the hurdy-gurdy would have been a familiar sound in an English street, now they are as rare as hen's teeth If you've never seen one, imagine a viola redesigned by Hieronymus Bosch and fitted with a big wheel instead of a bow The sound of the strings is complex, full of grit and grain — if much modern violin sound is as smooth as waterskiing on a lagoon, the hurdy-gurdy is an off-road dash through a farmyard on a filthy motorcycle Maybe the earthy sound is one reason why there seems to be a discreet revival of interest in this strange instrument

In England, hurdy-gurdy revivalists include the fiery improvisor and medieval specialist Stevie Wishart, and the folk musicians Chris Stapleton and Nigel Eaton, whose recent CD *The Duellists* (Panic ATC) is a strong example of new English compositions in a French traditional dance style Originally from Australia, Wishart and her hurdy-gurdy surface in diverse contexts, including medieval revivalists Sinfonye and the jump-cut dada Improv of Machines For Making Sense Eaton and Stapleton, by contrast, both played in the seminal folk dance group Blowzabella For *The Duellists* they add bagpiper Chris Walshaw to the two hurdy-gurdies, thus building the folk equivalent to Phil Spector's wall of sound Three drone instruments at once, all in the same pitch range and all grinding forth dense, high-fibre music — is this the most aural fun you can have without electricity?

In central France the hurdy-gurdy refused to die, and the bagpipe/hurdy-gurdy group is fundamentally a French style The classic recording is *Hurdy-Gurdy And Bagpipes* (Auvidis Ethniques) by Vielleux Du Bourbonnais (1985) — it's only a quartet, but at high volume this is a monolithic monument of a record Then there's Japanese guitarist Keiji Haino, whose hurdy-gurdy album, *The 21st Century Hard-y-Guide-y Man* (PSF), is an astonishing and intuitive response to the timbre of the instrument from a truly visionary musician Haino takes Tony Conrad's violin, John Cale's viola, his own guitar and LaMonte Young's drone, and locates them all in this European medieval instrument Thus the hurdy-gurdy is dropped right in the centre of late 20th century musical concerns unstable Ambient texture, collapsing structures, eerie shamanistic singing Haino explains the hurdy-gurdy's special appeal by pointing out that it's the only instrument where you have to turn a handle Clearly Haino hasn't yet discovered the barrel organ — that's a day I look forward to

The only European player who can match the sheer scale of Haino's soundscapes is the improvisor Dominique Regef, whose album *Tournenes* (Vand'oeuvre) is another real eye-opener of hurdy-gurdy potential The gaunt and hollow-cheeked Valentin Clastrier is another French player, who even manages to look medieval A misfit among misfits, in some ways he's the most eccentric of the lot He's certainly the fastest and most virtuoso player, and cattle-prods the hurdy-gurdy mercilessly into new areas through technical and electronic modifications For the two CDs *Hérésie* and *Le Bücher Des Silences* (recently reissued as a double set on Auvidis Silex as *Hurdy-Gurdy From The Land Of Cathars*) he assembled a six piece group around the tuba of Michel Godard and the excellent drums of Gerard Siracusa Most pieces are composed by Clastrier himself, dark-hued rhythmic showcases for his often frantic playing *Hérésie* has a tortured quality, like a sonic reworking of a Bosch painting Clastrier also sings a couple of times, employing Mongolian overtone techniques alongside what he calls the hurdy-gurdy's "cris d'orages" ("stormy shrieks") *Le Bücher Des Silences* (*The Funeral Pyre Of Silences*) is a shade more relaxed, and the group members are able to stretch out more, as if Clastrier has slackened off the bonds on his demonic torture-wheel

Musicians like Haino and Regef are improvisors in love with sound itself — their hurdy-gurdy playing radiates astonishment and gleeful discovery of what they can achieve with this contraption of gut, wood and rosin Regef sometimes produces a tone almost indistinguishable from a saxophone, and it's like watching a potter turn clay into a spiralling sculptural substance that seems to defy its inherent physical laws Clastrier, on the other hand, is more concerned with positioning the hurdy-gurdy in a virtuoso world where the legacies of jazz, traditional and contemporary musics are being fused to create something new A ferocious soloist, for Clastrier to work in an ensemble he needs players who can stand up to him, and the most recent album I've heard suggests they may have found him *Palude* (Wergo 1995) is by a trio of Clastrier, clarinettist Michael Riessler and percussionist Carlo Rizzo, and if Clastrier's name heads the list, this time it's for alphabetical reasons Palude is Italian for swamp, but no one is getting bogged down here The playing is highly skilful, the pace hectic, and the influence of the fevered Italian tarantella dance is often audible On clarinet Riessler has a wonderfully clear sound, and employs circular breathing to create remarkable solos evoking Mediterranean reed instruments like launeddas or bagpipes This is the sound of the hurdy-gurdy on holiday, invited out of the harsh northern weather to a warmer climate □





Stevie Wishart and Sinfonye. Right: Keiji Haino

S W A N S

"...From the beginning, The Swans have played stately, implacable songs that slammed home the certainty of suffering and death... through the years, they have set their lyrics to dissonant, gargantuan hard rock; to grim, machine-driven dance rhythms, and, most recently, to resonant drones. . The sense of finality gave the concert a bleak majesty. The repetition held a sense of ritual as the band bore down, building and building the songs, filling the room with invisible waves of overtones from the unchanging chords . It was a final, stoic dirge, this time for the band itself."

–John Parales
NY Times

"...An impeccable sounding live document of the bands' final two tours, that encapsulates the Swans entire 15-year career... The fact that the truly awesome, epic work will undoubtedly not turn up on many critics facile "top ten" lists this year, only confirms the magnitude of Swans' monumental "failure", a failure which damns all those enslaved fashion victims who would purport to to call themselves "critics' while going ga-ga over the new Madonna album."

– John Walker,
Addicted to Noise
Online Magazine

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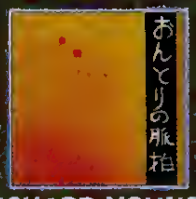
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bites

B12

Number crunchers

"Jazz Is The Teacher", declared Techno pioneer Juan Atkins. Longstanding UK Detroit enthusiasts B12 share those sentiments, but have gone a step further and named names. In place of the ambiguous, futuristic titles like "Cymetry" and "Praoxtopia" with which the duo of Mike Golding and Steve Rutter usually label their music, their new *3EP* disc contains three tracks titled in homage to a trio of jazz heroes: "Dave Brubeck", "Joe Morello" and "Ron Carter". "We thought we'd bring in some of the jazz stuff we listened to," says Golding at his home in Walthamstow, North London. "We've got quite substantial record collections of that stuff, so we bought ourselves a sampler and thought, let's go."

The EP marks a departure from the keyboard-driven, anti-sampling approach that defines most of their music to date. On "Dave Brubeck", the warm synth pads are demoted in the mix in favour of a Junglist tomb-slam of a bass drum and snare trill, while "Ron Carter"'s dark, mushy analogue synths lurk beneath the bright ride cymbal hits of the sampled drum break. "Our objection to sampled music was always that the sample can often become the track," clarifies Golding. "We've always sampled things but we've tried to make them unrecognisable as samples. What we've done on this EP is put a lot of work in so the sample doesn't become the majority of the track."

A more contemporary influence on B12's new music resides in the intricate microrhythms that characterise Rupert Parkes's Photek productions — a neat closing of the circle, as Parkes once named B12 as a prime influence on his own early Techno tracks.. "He stood out for us because he gets more layers into the things he does," explains Golding. "Some of the drum 'n' bass stuff is just too raw, but he gets a lot more feeling into it. The chopping up of breaks he does is amazing. It's probably more difficult and more creative to do that than it is to pull out a drum machine and create some interesting patterns."

The new material is the antithesis of the pure systems music with which B12 made their reputation. Initially inspired by the tough Brooklyn Techno of DJ Frankie Bones's *Bonesbreaks* series, the duo began releasing tracks in 1991, soon settling into a more Detroit-inflected style which was totally at odds with the post-rave Happy Hardcore productions which then ruled UK club culture. In fact the duo's import-style shrink-wrapped record sleeves, and exotic production aliases such as Redcell and Musicology, fooled many into thinking their tracks had been produced in the Motor City itself. In a 1993 interview, the duo were portrayed as zealous curators of a tradition of 'proper' Techno, and quoted as saying that Underground Resistance, "with their drug noise", had "deviated" from the music's true path. Do they still hold such 'heretical' views? "There's a place for everyone to do their thing," qualifies Golding. "In that context we were talking about Detroit people and we just said they're not making what we'd consider Techno. We're not really into hard Techno because we consider it solely club-based music. It's not slagging them off, it's just that they've moved away, but the same will probably be said about us now."

B12 found something of a niche with the rise of 'Intelligent' Techno in 1994, just as the more diffuse electronic music of The Black Dog, Aphex Twin and others was beginning to establish an audience. This new 'genre' was defined by the Warp label's *Artificial Intelligence* series. B12's contribution to the series, 1993's *Electro Soma* LP, had its halcyon moments, such as "Soundtrack Of Space", with its celestial, elongated chords, but it also featured more Detroit-influenced tracks like "Obsessed", in which the square waveform bassline echoed the dynamics of Derrick May's Rythim Is Rythim tracks such as "Wiggin'" or "It Is What It Is".

The LP went on to sell 25,000 copies, but B12 had no interest in embracing the scene. "We made it clear we were not interested in what the perception of the music was," says Golding. "To us it wasn't Ambient, Electronic Listening Music or Intelligent Techno — it was just Techno. We weren't following trends, we were just doing the music we love."

By the time of their second LP for Warp, 1996's *Time Tourist*, their influences seemed to have broadened. "DB5" paralleled the luscious Orientalisms of contemporaneous tracks by The Black Dog, while "Radiophonic Workshop" hinted at an older, buried English tradition of proto-Electronica currently being revived by groups such as Add N To X. "Making sure that your influences remain slightly diverse doesn't necessarily make you lose the feel of your music," argues Golding. "With the new EP, I'd like to think that people who listened to *Electro Soma* and *Time Tourist* can see there's something of the old B12 here rather than it being such a large swing away that it's unrecognisable."

"I don't know if 'Techno' applies to us anymore," he concludes. "Not because we've changed as people, but because what Techno means to us has changed. But we'll still carry on making the music we love — we're not about to become pop stars." **MIKE SHALLCROSS**

3EP is available now on Warp (through Vital)





Kato Hideki

Under heavy manners

"Someone was shooting a video of a Ground Zero gig and whenever I hit my bass the camera would vibrate," recalls the Brooklyn-based, Japanese ex-pat bassist/improvisor Kato Hideki. "It looked like we were playing in an earthquake." What makes for a *heavy* music? In *Rock And The Pop Narcotic*, the seminal polemic on heavy versus lite in musical aesthetics, Joe Carducci analysed the charged stomp of Zeppelin, Sabbath *et al*, concluding that the mystery of ensemble combustion lies not in some calculable pseudo-scientific sonic alchemy, but a more mystical and intuitive process of musical transubstantiation. On his own quest for heavy, the tasks and tactics Kato Hideki assumes and applies tend to be as technically nimble as they are sonically extreme, fusing responsible quotients of heart and head, reflecting both a Cagean faith in the autonomy of sound and a Bootsy-ish indulgence in its rich materiality. "I believe if people can expand the way they listen to music," he says, "it will be possible for them to see things differently."

Born and raised in a tiny town midway between Osaka and Tokyo, Kato stumbled across the tool of his trade by accident. "One day I found a bass in the garbage on the street," he recalls. "I took it home and plugged it into my practice amp. I was sitting on the amp and felt the vibrations through my body. I just loved the *feel*." By the late 80s, Kato had "found himself as an improvisor", meeting turntablist Otomo Yoshihide, joining Otomo's Ground Zero ensemble, and forming his own low end lava-rock trio Bass Army. "Through Otomo I met musicians like Tenko and John Zorn," he says. "Back then, Zorn was doing a lot of his projects in Tokyo, and I played on a couple of tracks on Makigami Koichi's *Koroshi No Blues*, which was produced by Zorn in New York in 1991." Feeling comfortable in the more fluid musical climate of downtown New York, and growing increasingly estranged from the rote behaviour of Tokyo's rock underground, Kato escaped, moving permanently to New York in 1992.

Following the familiar pattern of his new downtown New York co-conspirators, Kato retains membership in several working groups, and is involved in scores of part-time and one-off projects, all the while maintaining his own ensembles and solo career. His work first became known on a larger scale via the1995 CD *Death Ambient*, released on Zorn's Tzadik imprint and boasting the high-profile services of Ikue Mori and Fred Frith. Though conceived originally as a studio project, the group transformed itself into a sterling live unit, touring the US and Europe in 1996.

This increased visibility led logically to more opportunities. While on tour in Australia, Kato hooked up with the Melbourne-based Extreme label, who released his debut solo album, the swooning tone-tapestry *Hope And Despair*. The album was also largely engineered by Kato himself, exposing another important concern embedded in his aesthetic philosophy: to emphasise the scrape and clang of physical performance as much as the bass's deep natural sonority, and more accurately pronounce the conditions of performance, the spatial ambience and dynamic spectrum. "I don't get the whole lo-fi thing — noise music has to be hi-fi!" he says, an observation that, if not blindingly obvious, makes perfect sense. "People believe that the technology is getting better, but we are losing so much in the signal chain, especially in improvised music, where there is so much going on sonically. If you miss it, there is less music."

Two new titles on Zorn's Avant label further showcase Kato's work. *Hades Park*, the new album from vocalist Tenko's group Dragon Blue, reunites Otomo and Kato in a limber and volatile rock-ish context. The self-titled debut CD by Dying Ground, a power trio led by violinist Eyvind Kang and featuring Kato and ex-James Blood Ulmer drummer Calvin Weston, is equal parts Blood Ulmer, Painkiller and *Paranoid*-era Sabbath. This flurry of activity has catalyzed, and will hopefully draw more attention to, Kato's own upcoming projects. *Turbulent Zone*, an album of solo bass improvisations, is also the inaugural release on his own label, Music For Expanded Ears, a partnership with the composer Terasaki Keitaro. An exhaustive probing of the very limits of bass possibilities, the album features a quasi-Pythagorean tuning method which actually required a tape measure to implement. Echoing the just intonation systems of mystic technicians like Tony Conrad, Kato's tunings revolve around prime numbers, and double as titles for the pieces themselves, further exemplifying the complex wedding of aesthetic concept to technical implementation in his music. "I wanted something other than myself to have control over me while I improvised," he says. "In other words, the tuning system is like nature and I am just the medium." **AC LEE**

Hades Park *and* Dying Ground *are out now on Avant (through Harmonia Mundi). Turbulent Zone can be ordered from Kato Hideki's Website:* www.expandedears.com

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Roster includes Surrogat, Kante, Couch, Laub, To Rococo Rot, Tarwater, Go Plus, Schwermut Forest, Brullen

Description Diverse post-rock/Electronica crossover roster helps new German music move away from Krautrock or machine-Techno stereotypes

Brief history Raik and Patrick meet in 1993 at a radio show in Berlin. Surrogat, Patrick's group, is looking for a label to release their first record. Raik and Patrick decide to put out the *Lugano Collection* single box with Kerosene, Surrogat and Wuhling. Kitty-Yo is born. After following struggles with groups like Wuhling, To Rococo Rot, etc, Kitty-Yo recovers, and starts to focus on international subjects. Antye from Laub joins the team in 1997, same time as her record is being released on Kitty-Yo. Constanze leaves Hamburg at the end of 1997, gets to Berlin and to Kitty-Yo. In 98 Kitty-Yo takes over the United States of America and hopefully Great Britain.

Statement of intent Staying independent from stupid structures and people, having a good time, spreading our music all over the whole planet, getting bigger and keepin' it real and remaining true to our motto 'We are family'

Other activities Kitty-Yo and City Slang are going to build up a club in Berlin. This was inspired by the very open-minded ways of English labels. co-operations among labels for the better of both parties — no fear! And there'll finally be a Kitty-Yo Website (in tandem with City Slang) by the summer. Other 'other activities' we all have our daily jobs, catering, clerk in a bookstore, painting walls.

Future plans A most amazing electronic completely hardcore release by some Austrian fellows. Preed, LPs by Schwermut Forest, Tarwater and Go Plus, spreading our international contacts, label tours in Italy, Netherlands and the UK, and we're going to build out our office, so that each one of us has a chair to sit on.

Choice cuts To Rococo Rot — *To Rococo Rot*; Laub — *Kopflastig*

(Info & manifesto: Raik & Antye)

Mass

Free electric band

"I prefer the term 'collision' to 'fusion'," says Gary Jeff, bassist and electronics manhandler in the new London power trio Mass. He is attempting to articulate the earthquaking, sky-kissing beauty of Mass music, a place where the dissonant Country blues of Son House and Charlie Patton meet the rattled black space of early electronic composition and the scorched earth improvisations of Fushitsusha and Tony Williams Lifetime. "It's all about impact," Jeff continues, "jazz, rock, all these other styles meeting head-on and sparks flying everywhere."

Mass is the latest vehicle for the incendiary guitar of Gary Smith. Although Smith is a relatively unknown player, he's been a constant presence on the fringes of experimental music for the past three decades. Playing at the London Musicians Collective in the 70s and leading The Acme Quartet — a post-Lifetime trio who played during the punk fallout of 1978-79 — he released his first solo guitar record, *Rhythm Guitar*, in 1992, going on to record a duo session with the late drummer John Stevens which was released in 1996. After Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore picked up on the duo recording, releasing it on his Ecstatic Peace label, Smith went on to record his first group explorations since the late 70s with bassist Dave Sturt and ex-God drummer Lou Ciccotelli. Five tracks from these sessions showed up on last year's *Stereo* album (issued by the Chronoscope label), alongside some of Smith's most savage solo soundings yet. Founding a full-time group seemed to be the logical next step.

"Mass really came into existence after the *Stereo* recordings with Lou," Smith explains. "The original bass player wasn't right, and Lou suggested Gary Jeff, who he had played with in God. It could have been a solo record, but I'm a group player essentially. Not having to be at the frontline lets you work on all sorts of different levels."

Despite his background in free improvisation, Mass sees Smith return to his first love, the powerhouse aesthetic of the likes of Blue Cheer or the pre-Sabbath Earth. "It's not free jazz, definitely not," Smith declares. "It's a rock group. Not in the conventional sense, perhaps, but I certainly think of what we're doing as being rock songs, absolutely. Ideally Mass would have a singer, and I'd get into structures and push it as far as I could while retaining all of the sound elements. It'd become a pop group, and to me that's not a derogatory term."

For Smith, there is no creative challenge in playing free jazz or Euro-styled improvisation today. "For me the idiom is so defined; these players are great musicians, but where's the imagination, where else are you going to go? The point is to impress with your imagination. It's like that quality in the music of someone like Son House, the presence that makes your spine tingle. Where's that coming from? That's what I'm interested in.

"For me," he continues, "jazz has been seriously dead since 1968. European improvisation has been dead as a language since some time in the 70s. So I'm not some bloke who's interested in playing freeform, I like to shape forms as I'm going along. There should be a load of guitarists like me but there isn't. There should be a whole generation of players who came out of rock music, who didn't come out of jazz but did a lot of improvising and are now looking for this new form of expression. Where are they?"

Over the years Smith has developed a deeply personal and idiosyncratic approach to the guitar: all swirling circular rhythms and overdriven loops which bring to mind the all-night flights of Terry Riley, with similarly high-minded results. Smith builds hovering feedback shapes, sometimes dropping down to snatch stray Loren Mazzacane-style notes into the loop or firing off murderous bone-crusher riffs. "I'm certainly interested in dissonance," he continues, "in the sheer energy it's possible to generate through guitar, bass and drums, but not simply as a means to sound 'challenging' or modern. Rather it's like a magnification of one aspect of old folk songs or Country blues."

It's this dark hearted sensibility which charges the atmosphere of Mass's self-titled debut. At times impossibly violent and cranked up, other times spooked and strung out, there are few active groups this side of Tokyo's Fushitsusha which can boast such a command of rock's visceral rip, the roaring freedom-trail of jazz and the austere beauty of classical composition. "Mass is what rock music was originally supposed to be about," claims Gary Jeff. "Primitive energy." **DAVID KEENAN** Mass *is released this month on Paratactile (through Harmonia Mundi)*



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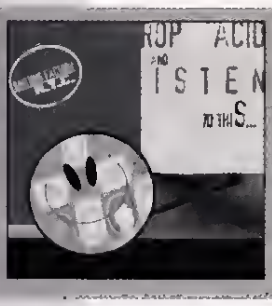
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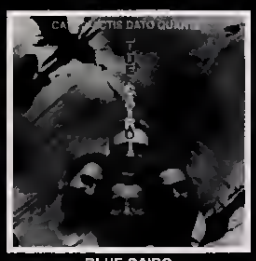
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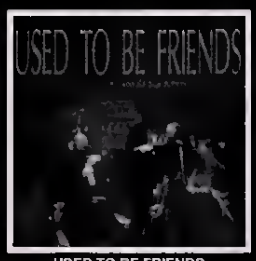
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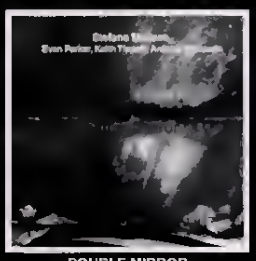
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Solex

Dutch courier



In the motorcycle world, the Kreidler is the Rolls Royce of two wheelers, and the Solex is the Mini Moke. Appropriate, then, that *Solex Vs The Hitmeister*, the debut release by Dutch DIY artist Elizabeth Esselink (aka Solex), putters along shedding spare parts in a cloud of steam. There's a touch of Midas about Elizabeth, as she explains while sitting in a bar in East Amsterdam, where she co-owns a secondhand record shop. "In January 97 I bought an eight track recorder and a very old sampler in an auction. I raised my hand, and on the first bid I immediately got it, so I was very lucky. At that moment I was still in a guitar noise band [called Sonetic Vet], but we never had success, and it always took a lot of energy to make sounds. I thought, maybe it's better to do something on my own, you can work very quickly, you don't have to compromise on anything, you don't have to talk for hours about a song."

Within a few months of playing around with her new gadget, plucking samples from a pile of her shop's unsellable CDs, Esselink suddenly found she had a bunch of songs on tape — and all were practically unrepeatable, since she could no longer obtain the floppy disks needed to store sounds on her ancient machine. The American label Matador was the first to show an interest: an air ticket to New York turned up in the post one morning, triggering off an experience like something out of *Get Carter*. "It was kind of strange," she says, "like a blind date, because I'd only spoken to them on the phone. I got to New York, and a car picked me up at the airport and brought me to a hotel, and then after an hour the phone rang in the room, and I had to describe what I was wearing so they would recognise me if I was standing on the pavement. Then we went out to dinner and talked about music and a lot of things, and it felt really good."

The 12 songbites on the album make up a dream diary with a pinch-me twist: an old woman goes deaf from too many visits to the Grand Prix, a girl dressed *"like aircrew"* turns up at Solex's boyfriend's door inquiring about *"a kind of hijack"*. Esselink has already been compared to female-fronted sampling groups such as Portishead, but her oddly phrased vocal deliveries and skewed prose poems avoid the cult of 'sensitivity' and vulnerability propagated by Beth Gibbons, while avoiding the ad agency-friendly feist of Sneaker Pimps, Republica *et al*. "Some of the lyrics are very private, but some of them are made up situations. It's more like very detailed sketches, not real stories with clear beginnings, middles and ends." Like a cartoon heroine in a weekly adventure, the name Solex appears in the title of each track. "Solex In A Slipshod Style", "Waking Up With Solex", Solex's Snag", "Rolex By Solex". "Solex can change identities in every song," she says. "It also can be a woman and in some songs it can be a boy. If you put the name in every song, then it comes more alive. It's a kind of rip-off of children's books from Enid Blyton, The Famous Five, and I thought it was a very good concept — they use it in comic strips all the time."

Her latest adventure has been touring with Asian-indie stars Cornershop, and performing in a bar at the summit of New York's World Trade Centre. Strange to imagine the sonic detritus of Solex's backing tapes journeying from an unwanted CD pile in Amsterdam to reach the ears of the most influential bricks in Wall Street. But that's the nature of The Hitmeister: it turns rubbish into gold. "All the samples, they come off records that will never become a hit. I didn't use a computer: if you play it in by hand, you can go with the flow of the beats." She'll be keeping the old machine, then? "I've bought a new sampler now," she admits. "I have to make a new record, and I have an idea for another concept that's never been used before. But I'm not going to tell you, because I'm afraid somebody else will do it!"

ROB YOUNG Solex Vs The Hitmeister *is released this month on Matador (through Vital)*



fast track

Biba Kopf quizzes Anthony Moore about the sudden reappearance, after two decades, of avant-nonsense trio SLAPP HAPPY

The new album is called *Ça Va*?

Ça va, that's not as silly as it sounds. It came from Peter Blegvad's visual eye [Blegvad being one third of Slapp Happy alongside Moore and singer Dagmar Krause], looking at the two words, with the cedilla on the C and finding it a satisfying code or mystery, and it relates to our very first album somehow, which was called *Sort Of. Ça Va* also has a very cryptic quality about it, 'It goes' being the rather literal translation.

Why get back together now, after 20 years?

It's the prevailing belief of Geoff Travis [Rough Trade and Banana Records founder] that we were some kind of mine that hadn't yet given up all its gold, he was convinced there was at least another album left in us. Once he'd managed to get the funding for a record, it would have been churlish not to do it.

How was it for you, coming together after so long?

Well, we've never really lost touch with each other. The project we last collaborated on for Channel Four, called *Camera*, had Dagmar in the starring role, Peter as the librettist and myself doing the music. So it wasn't so much of a shock. Even musically, it seemed as if those intervening years hadn't happened, it just clicked straight away. Very unproblematic.

It does sound very fresh. . .

That's probably got a lot to do with the fact that Peter and I played all the instruments, and we would never claim to be great musicians, which automatically leaves you with a certain kind of innocent freshness.

Is Slapp Happy's 'eccentric' tag an albatross or a Trojan horse?

How could it be an albatross? Because it condemns us to only a modicum of critical acclaim away from the commercial market place? We never really imagined us being in that place anyway. Trojan horse? There is a subversive, even gleeful feeling, certainly in the early days of Slapp Happy, of infiltrating the expectations of the audience only to undermine them with subversive content. Innocuous music with perverted lyrics, which perhaps adds up to a Trojan horse strategy, but that makes us sound like too self-conscious an act, when what we do just falls out of us really.

Is there any place for humour in music?

There's a place for it in the relationship between music, lyrics and the way that it is made. Whether there is a place for humour in instrumental music I rather think not. It would be illustrative and programmatic, but maybe there is something humorous in the juxtaposition of things that would not normally belong together, such as Dagmar singing surrealistic lyrics with a Country & Western backing.

How come experienced, educated types like yourselves choose wit as a weapon, while young, inexperienced types always come on so deep and meaningful?

Gracious me, that's quite complicated! Again, we don't choose. It may look awfully contrived, the mixture of Daggi, Peter and myself, but funnily enough it's not. Personally, I've got no problem with deep and meaningful. On the other hand, when wit is self congratulatory, I find it quite disgusting and I wouldn't really want to be seen to be in that smug light of being witty and clever. Perhaps it's not so much that we are witty as world weary. □ Ça Va *is out now on Banana/V2 (through 3MV/Sony)*

global ear

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month . . .

Tokyo

In mid-morning, along the main street in Akihabara, Tokyo's self-proclaimed 'Electric Town', kids are skipping school and salarymen are risking disciplinary action to stand in line in the hope of buying up the latest flash-marketed computer game cartridge. The atmosphere is as serious as a Communist bread-queue. It's not clear exactly which game they're after, but chances are it won't be a hack 'n' slash variety. Because in the doorways of the gaming arcades further along the street, the machines they're using to fish for custom aren't gore 'n' score rampage-fests *à la Doom* or *Duke Nukem*, but a new DJ Battle game console called *Beatmania*. It's mounted with two rubber slipmats on which players compete to produce the most florid feats of scratching, along with a graphic HipHop score depicted on the screen. And it's not the only music-based game currently popular in Japan (and busily spreading abroad): a short train ride south to the commercial towers of Ginza brings you to the Sony Building, in which you can paw every product currently available from the electronics giant. There, viewed on a giant colour hi-res screen, you can try your hand at two more amusements on the Playstation. *Papparappa*, a rapping challenge in which a two-dimensional puppy gets steered around a series of cartoon rooms, and you have to punch a button as close as possible to the rhythm of his chat; and *Shake A Move*, in which a selection of onscreen avatars — puffy robot, buxom manga chick — boogie in a vast public arena, throwing an occasional backflip to outsmoke their dancing opponent or causing a ten ton weight to splatter the enemy into the floor.

All good, clean, profit-boosting fun. But in certain sections of the 'real world' these games cartoonishly portray, things don't seem to be running quite so smoothly. Ken Ishii, for example, has just licenced his new album, *Screaming Metal America*, to Sony Japan, and composed an electronic theme for the Nagano Winter Olympics, whose blizzard of publicity was jerking patriotic tears from the crowds around every public video monitor or bar TV set in the city for most of February. These twin events might represent triumphs



for Ishii, opportunities to carry his music beyond the confines of the global electronic network, but for others they represent a betrayal. "[Ishii] has abandoned the scene, he wants to become a big pop star," says Tsutomu Noda, editor of *Ele-King* magazine, which focuses on domestic and international electronic and dance music. However, it's not exactly clear what 'scene' Ishii has abandoned. With at least four zones of Tokyo concentrated enough to be called a 'centre', there aren't many obvious focal points for musicians to let each other know they're there. It's the large spaces that still reign supreme — like the Liquid Room, a vast, blackened hall on the seventh floor of a Shinjuku condo, hosting names like Richie Hawtin and Cristian Vogel.

Tokyo's many specialist record labels, too, are mostly small time operations. The warren of offices occupied by the Headz collective look the way their music sounds: vinylogged. Akira Sasaki and Hashim Bharoocha are drowning in a soup of records, CDs and tapes, and it's a wonder they can find any space to run their stable of labels, including Shi-Ra-Nui, Soup Disk and 360°, plus an independent magazine called *Fader*. But they survive by niche-marketing CD runs of 500 or 1000, mainly sold in specialist shops or departments of chainstores. They have a shop on their doorstep, in fact — next door, Kurara is an avant garde vinyl completist's wet dream. More of a private collection that happens to be on sale than a commercially viable business, this small room houses hundreds of records you'd never have dreamed existed, from the leftest of left fields. Shop owner Nonyasu Nogai's speciality is sound art and concrete poetry recordings by figures such as Josef Beuys, Kurt Schwitters, Hermann Nitsch, and others, plus Japanese noise experiments and Ambient electric tone drones. There's also a wall of impossibly rare LPs of early electronic music and *musique concrète*.

Like Kurara, you wouldn't know ¿Los Apson? existed if you hadn't been told, and at seven in the evening it's similarly devoid of customers. This is a vinyl haven with a space age Mexican theme, and the racks are labelled with categories like '¡Scum Y Abuso!', '¡Pop Perversidad!', '¡Sol Ra!', and '¿Que?'. Apart from the proprietor, the only other occupant is one Moodman, a musician about whom I had been warned, but who turns out to be polite, almost shy. Handing me some of his latest releases, a CD wrapped in a white sheep-fleece, and a 3" CD by Asteroid Oesert Songs (a musician whose day job is running the avant garde section in Shibuya's Tower Records), he points towards some of his favourites among the shop's stock. These are mainly cassette releases — DJ battles snuck in from the States, homegrown noise, and some extraordinary homemade tape covers with melted plastic sculptures festooning the cassette boxes. It's fantastic, obsessive folk art, but symptomatic of the diminishing returns that are starting to cripple not just the music industry, but the whole Japanese economy.

Perhaps the real root of the troubles comes from above — where the equipment comes from. A frank sentence in a policy document to be found on Sony's official Website could be taken for a microcosm of the crisis in the worldwide Electronica movement at the moment: "Sony lacks strategy. Product development, manufacturing and marketing are all well established, but the firm lacks any formal long term direction."

For me, this trip was always going to be for the purpose of ambience-detecting rather than fact-finding, but as it turned out the last two, blustery weeks in February didn't seem to contain much of interest in the clubs or concert platforms. The best music I heard was practically aleatoric, and caught you off guard: an amazing, amplified, ecstatic Hare Krishna quintet busking a 30 minute hymn of praise underneath the West Side of Shinjuku station, generating ecstasy on finger cymbals and a hand tambura as the rain-soaked crowds hurry past into massive department stores. The spine-tingling Fender Rhodes fanfare before every platform announcement on the Shinjuku Sobu Line. The abrasive clatter of coins blasting out of every pachinko parlour — the ubiquitous pink-and-blue-neon cash engines allegedly run by the Yakuza — now revealed as a hidden influence on the white noisecurd of fetishcore acts like Masonna, Aube, and Merzbow.

I did, however, manage to catch up with one of many Boredoms side projects we never get to hear about in the West: the all-girl quartet 1011, live at the achingly funky Milk club. The room is packed, and the crowd seem to rise and fall on each spiky integer of 1011's polymath-rock. From straight-ahead Metal thrash to one-note whining mantras, the music is a perfect encapsulation of the fascination of Japanese music. You recognise the materials, but you can't read the signs and you've no idea what the building's for. **ROB YOUNG**

PHOTOS: ROB YOUNG



Above: Rack dividers at ¿Los Apson?. Top: Headz' Akira Sasaki and Hashim Bharoocha

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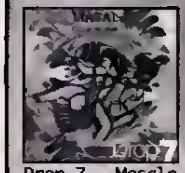
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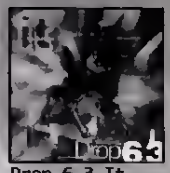


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In the latest reel of his **secret history of film music**, Philip [illegible]rophy investigates the sonic soundtrack



Al Pacino in *Heat*

PHOTOS BFI STILLS

Two cheap scenarios somewhere right now, a director is figuring what songs to use in his movie Being a young, hip dude, he buys young, hip CDs from Tower His cutting edge film will feature a slew of cutting edge tracks Somewhere else, another producer is figuring out the songs to use in her movie She knows nothing about music — at least the kind she thinks she needs to make her movie cutting edge But she's already calling up a record company to 'check out' what they've got that's 'hot' Well, OK, what with their cheap marketing ideas about rock 'n' roll or whatever the music you cherish, movie execs are easy targets But unfortunately numerous post-80s youth films — as opposed to not-so-hip 80s teen movies — play the boardroom game, the result being countless soundtrack-as-compilation albums that document both the narrowness of such directors' supposedly eclectic musical tastes, and the cynical self-reflexiveness of record industry marketing departments

Plastering film soundtracks with chartable playlists might have become rampant, but that doesn't mean it's time to bring back the specious naturalism of booming symphony orchestras, tinkling grand pianos and delicate acoustic guitars For there is still great potential in the chaotic collisions of rock/pop songs appended, Frankenstein-like, to a film soundtrack. Indeed, in a period when cinema is more and more a frail corpse administered by 'script doctors', spinning records on the soundtrack has recast film as a sonic experience rather than a visual, literary or theatrical one

When Mott The Hoople's "All The Way From Memphis" blasts onto the screen in Martin Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1975), its incongruity is considered and appropriate, befitting the film's themes of dislocation Yet nothing in the lyrics directly relates to the film's themes, nor does the scene require any historical evocation that might orient the track as 'period music' Additionally, the song's positioning is in no way comedic, irreverent, parodic or ironic. Some writer-directors might still believe it's somehow profound to play a track that relates to their film's literary themes, as if their target audience were a gaggle of literature professors assessing an essay on thematic articulation, but Scorsese uses the roughly contemporaneous "All The Way From Memphis" for the way its sonic qualities become one with the grain of the film His choice (either alone or with his music supervisors) evidences an ear for the malleable and enticing ingredients of a song — its construction, its presence, its production, its tonality. Of course, Scorsese also often rationalises songs for period purposes and their lyrics' thematic connections, but his primary consideration is how a song's *sound* will vibrate with the scenic moment.

Scorsese's musical sensibility reaches a peak in *GoodFellas* (1990) The film opens with an extreme close-up of an eye But he's bluffing the film is more about a dense aural architecture constructed across time to chart the Ray Liotta character's changing perception of himself and his social reality Music — more precisely, the changing sound of recorded music — creates exacting memory spaces for the unfolding of the film's scenes The vitality and brashness of the 60s is framed by the hyper-compressed reverb of songs by The Ronettes, The Shangri Las and Bobby Dann, the blunted and altered perceptions of the 70s are harshly boxed by the fractured multi-tracking and denaturalised mixing of songs by Derek And The Dominos, Brewer And Shipley and Sid Vicious Themes are thus relocated into the aural fields of the accompanying recordings As the film hurtles toward the present, changes in the orientation of Liotta's commentary parallels changes in his stereo equipment, moving from breathy, lingering valve mics and line-fed echo chambers to overloaded effects-

chaining that compensates for the fetishization of acoustically 'dead' studios

Scorsese, then, is one of the very few directors with an ear for song. Another is Michael Mann. Where Scorsese 'auralises' his films' production design through the individual production qualities of the records he includes on the soundtrack, Mann works pre-recorded songs into the expanded audio-visual design of his films. Counter to the Scorsese method, Mann seeks to narrate, compile and underscore film through song, to arrive at 'song-seeming scores' that exploit the dynamics, characteristics and idiosyncrasies of pop/rock recordings.

To this end, Mann has been remarkably consistent. His symbiotic relationship with Tangerine Dream suggests that the "indifference, asynchronism, amorphism and transcendentalism" of the Berliners' hovering four chord approach is as much a trait of his own preoccupations. Just consider how many variations Mann has spun from the mental instability of cunning serial killers and the obsessive detectives who trail them. If the centrepiece of *GoodFellas* has to be the heady kineticism induced by cutting Nilsson's manic "Jump Into The Fire" with the sounds of helicopter buzzing, pasta bubbling and coke snorting, it was actually Michael Mann who established this quasi-hallucinogenic technique of song spatialisation, via the unedited positioning of Iron Butterfly's "In A Gadda Da Vida" in *Manhunter* (1985). While deaf ears might cite its use as an example of cheesy irony or bad taste, the way it is mixed into the soundtrack blurs the distinction between whether the song lives in the film or the film lives within the song. The track booms from a tape through the serial killer's underground chambers as he prepares for a final killing, with the detective all the while closing in on his deadly subterranean world. The chamber's acoustics distort the song, facilitating both our cohabitation of the killer's mental space, and our experience of a symbolic aural space which embodies the synchronously warped frame of mind of killer, detective and victim. Remarkably, the truly inept production quality of Iron Butterfly's original recording takes on an unnerving charismatic appeal in the film through its refraction of the psychotic Other, and its power to suck both victim and detective into its otherworldly droning din.

The 'Mann effect' of extenuating a song's sonic traits to define the material realm of a scene's action was



heavily workshopped through his TV series *Miami Vice* (1985-87, Jan Hammer plus songs) and *Crime Story* (1987-89, Todd Rundgren plus songs) where much of what we mistakenly assume to be an MTV effect (droll sound-image counterpoint, adrenaline inducing audio-visual momentum, excessively stylistic musical inflation, etc) was originally defined. Mann's peak in tracking music this way is reached in *Heat* (1995). Combining a calming and contiguous track selection with a melting, amorphous score by Elliot Goldenthal (sounding like Glenn Branca doing John Barry), Mann plays sophisticated games in breaking down all distinction between song and score while building upon the armoury of effects and figures generated within music recording rather than film scoring.

Heat is profoundly complex in these regards. Its leaning towards Ambient stylings sets up a synchronicity between the songs by Eno, Passengers, Moby, Kronos Quartet, Terje Rypdal, Michael Brook, Einsturzende Neubauten and Lisa Gerrard, and the exhausted emotional drainage of the Al Pacino and Robert De Niro characters, whose sense of purposeful conflict is rendered meaningless by the film's conclusion. Just as Toru Takemitsu's inverse musical dramatics are central to the deflated heroics of Akira Kurosawa's historical dramas, so too are the Ambient brethren of the *Heat* soundtrack crucial to the creeping existentialism which eventually upturns its epic form. And just as the sound of space has become the prime erogenous zone of Ambient music, *Heat*'s musical scoring is the prime means of actively spatialising the film's locations and environments — especially as a counterpoint to the cinematography's highly fragmented framing aesthetic. From the low level string murmurs accompanying De Niro's placid escalator rides in the film's opening, to the hammering synth pops and concatenated reverb bangs underscoring the screams of employees and customers during the bank heist, ambience is actually foregrounded as style and form in *Heat*.

So many other celebrated song-oriented soundtracks pale against *Heat* and *GoodFellas*, because Mann and Scorsese's narrative use of the various songs' sensibilities is simply so advanced. In comparison, Quentin Tarantino is the Wolfman Jack of music supervisors, combining sensationalist sounds for sensationalist purpose. It is more carney promotion than postmodernism, and certainly matches the pyrotechnic mania of his genre-drunk cine-bashes. But the mere act of selecting a song for a movie soundtrack neither ensures nor fixes the depth of its contribution to the film, and the reduction of music to markers of hipness alone is reactionary and limiting. □

selections

potential of records in an age when movies are treated as marketing devices for CD compilations



odd man out

Two decades since the epochal *Are You Glad* to sculpt new forms out of blues, jazz, funk

"When I'd get to one thing, I'd always want to get to something else." So says James Blood Ulmer, a player who indisputably ranks among the most distinctive of all guitarists, rock, jazz, funk or otherwise. He is referring to the fitful progress of his early career, but such an attitude goes a long way towards explaining the stylistically diverse nature of the many groups which Ulmer has fronted over the past two decades. There's Music Revelation Ensemble, a hard-blowing harmolodic quartet with a revolving sax chair; The Odyssey Band, a quixotic trio with violin and drums, its polar opposite, The Black Rock Trio, which was the core group on a pair of early 80s albums which nearly redefined funk-rock for the post-Funkadelic/Eddie Hazel generation; Phalanx, an infrequently convened all-star free jazz quartet which featured the late saxophonist George Adams and, sometimes, ex-Coltrane drummer Rashied Ali, and The Blues Experience, which doesn't actually play anybody's standard definition of the blues.

Ulmer's musical roots are even more varied. Born in South Carolina in 1947, his earliest musical experience came in a family gospel group at the age of nine, singing and playing guitar. "My father was a straight guy, a Christian guy," Ulmer recalls. "He played the guitar and he had a quartet. All the children were automatically on the team." There were nine children in all, and, Ulmer says laughing, "He had all of us, as we came out, on the spiritual kick." The elder Ulmer was also named James, and so the youngster's mother called her latest son James Blood to distinguish him.

Blood's musical upbringing came in handy when he finished high school and moved to Pittsburgh to live with a cousin. When it was time to start paying rent, he auditioned for a gig with The Savoys, a local doo-wop group, using a borrowed guitar; the group's manager was so impressed that he bought him a guitar and amplifier and gave him the job. The Savoys were good enough to play on *The Dick Clark Show*, and Ulmer's next gig was with an even more successful group of similar ilk, The Del-Vikings. "One gig, Sammy Davis was the MC," he remembers. "But I wasn't really playing nothing. I guess what I wanted to do was solo."

Ulmer was also playing in a group on the side, a trio of guitar, piano, and drums: "I used to play the bassline on the guitar. We played every weekend." At this point, it being the mid-60s, Ulmer's model of a guitar hero was a tad surprising. "Chuck Berry," he says, "he had me really messed up. For a long time he was the person I had to find out how to play like. Church music and blues, that was all the same kind of stuff, but Chuck Berry was playing something different. It was all kinds of stuff all hooked up, which turned out to be rock 'n' roll."

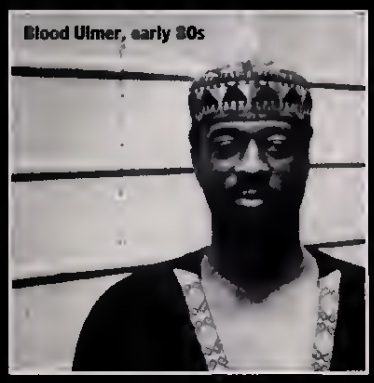
While still in Pittsburgh, Ulmer met tenor saxophonist George Adams, best known years later for his long-standing quartet with pianist Don Pullen, and the two of them spent three years together in an R&B outfit, The Swing Kings. Adams told the young guitarist about jazz and played him records by Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Art Tatum. "Ain't none of them had no guitar," Ulmer laughs, "but what happened was, I fell in love with the music."

The guitarist pursued this new muse by joining organist Hank Marr's group in Ohio, and eventually brought Adams into that line-up. "Hank was playing the standards, and in those days the guitar player would get two choruses, so I was getting closer, closer. But the horn players could play until they got tired."

Ulmer made his first recordings with Marr's group, but for most listeners, the earliest Ulmer they'll hear is on a pair of Blue Note albums with organist Big John Patton, 1969's *Accent On The Blues* and *Memphis To New York*, which went unreleased until the 1990s. Though he freely admits to an early Wes Montgomery influence, Ulmer avers, "When I made that record [*Accent On The Blues*] I had left the organ style and I was in kind of a really rebellious state. I was trying to rebel against playing like anybody. I really wasn't trying to play like Wes then. I was really trying to get free. I would play so out of key [at gigs] I would get fired after the first night. I went through that for a long time. The guy who was making that record, Francis Wolff, all while we were making it he was telling me, 'Wes Montgomery, Wes Montgomery!' He was gonna record me after that record and then he died."

Ulmer's move to New York City brought him work with saxophonist Joe Henderson, on the *Multiple* album, and a session with another maverick organist, Larry Young. These latter recordings resulted in Young's now virtually unknown 1973 Perception album *Lawrence Of Newark*. Both *Multiple* and *Lawrence Of Newark* (and one track on that album in particular, the epic cosmo-funk jam "Khalid Of Space") encapsulated the mood among frontline jazz players in the post-*Bitches Brew*, post-*Electric Ladyland* New York of the early 70s, and seemed to set the seal on the kind of wild, organic fusions which would later define Ulmer's own music. Again, for the *Lawrence Of Newark* sessions, Ulmer was supposed to play like a more famous guitarist, though this time the directive went unspoken. "Larry was always upset, because he liked Jimi Hendrix. He was always trying to get me to do something but he never would want to tell me to do it like Jimi, but I knew. But if I'm older than somebody, I ain't gonna try and play like him. I'm older than Jimi Hendrix."





Blood Ulmer, early 80s

MAIN PHOTO: ANDREW POTHECARY

To Be In America? album came out on Rough Trade, the music of **James Blood Ulmer** continues rock, and the esoteric music systems of his mentor, Ornette Coleman. Words: Steve Holtje

Meanwhile, Ulmer was playing regularly at New York's bebop Mecca, Minton's Playhouse (until it went out of business), and even joined Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers (the preference of the group's trumpeter Woody Shaw for piano rather than guitar led to Ulmer's tenure being brief and unrecorded). More importantly, he began playing in a group led by Rashied Ali, exploring the territory that had been blown wide open by John Coltrane's last group, which had featured Ali alongside Alice Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders. "Rashied was the very first drummer I played with when I came to New York," remembers Ulmer. "He had a band, and that was what turned me, sucked me into playing free. I mean, I was practising on it in Detroit, but Rashied was playing free for real. They ain't countin' no bars. What got me stuck, I was finally in a band where I could play anything that came to my mind. I could play anything that came to my head at any given moment. The guitar fit in there a little

more I could play my own voicings and play my own lines And Rashied let me write music for his band, too"

The most pivotal moment in Ulmer's career came in 1972 when drummer Billy Higgins told him Ornette Coleman wanted a guitar player Though his work with Coleman went unrecorded (except for a concert bootleg), Ulmer's 1972-74 tenure in a couple of Coleman's early, pre-Prime Time electric groups brought the guitarist more attention than his previous gigs Needless to say, it was also an intense learning experience, which Ulmer maximixed by moving into Coleman's famed loft on Prince Street in SoHo, absorbing the saxophonist's theory of harmolodics, a system which allowed the three elements of music — HARmony, MOtion (rhythm) and meLODy — equal importance

"I was really taken by that music, because Coleman made what I was playing seem so necessary, made it seem very important, my concept, how I play," he says "He was the only person that did that for me, gave me that kind of confidence So I worked hard and I related the whole thing, what I was doing, to the harmolodic concept. Looking at the guitar harmolodically, you have much, much more to work out than playing conventional You have to think about more than chords and scales — in fact, you can eliminate chords and scales, as far as all the other stuff you have to do to make it work. That whole system made me come up with a whole new tuning and everything, trying to actually fit the harmolodic system.

"What saved me with Coleman's music is, he told me I was a natural harmolodic player, so that eased my pain I'd worried about it, but he made me an honorary citizen [laughs]. Whatever I do natural is harmolodic. So all I had to do was work on my theory He really got into the concept of writing harmolodic as well as playing That's a different thing, got to do it more on paper But when I start playing I don't like following notes, I just open the door to the heart. But he thinks he can actually do the same thing when he's playing as he's doing when he's composing"

> **"At gigs I would play so out of key I would get fired after the first night. I went through that for a long time"**

Even now, harmolodics remains a much-explained yet rarely understood system Ulmer's take on it goes like this "When you think harmolodic, everybody got a right to do what they do You don't have no right to take nothing from what the next guy's playing or interfere with him at all If you can't add to his shit, stay out of it! That's how harmolodic is one person doing this, you doing this, this and this, and you all play music together Three or four languages going on at the same time, talking about the same thing."

As Ulmer speaks of other matters, it becomes clear that he thinks of harmolodics as much more than a musical system For him, it seems more like a life philosophy For instance, he tells me that he hasn't worked with Coleman in nearly two decades, "but me and him was always close because of that music we're coming from, the literary part, which was good Right down to today, every time I talk to Coleman we have a lot of fun, when we get together we're harmolodic It ain't really about playing You don't have to be a player to be harmolodic You can be harmolodic without playing any instrument That's the thing about it. It's this groove that you just don't do, there's just things that you don't do, because it's harmolodic"

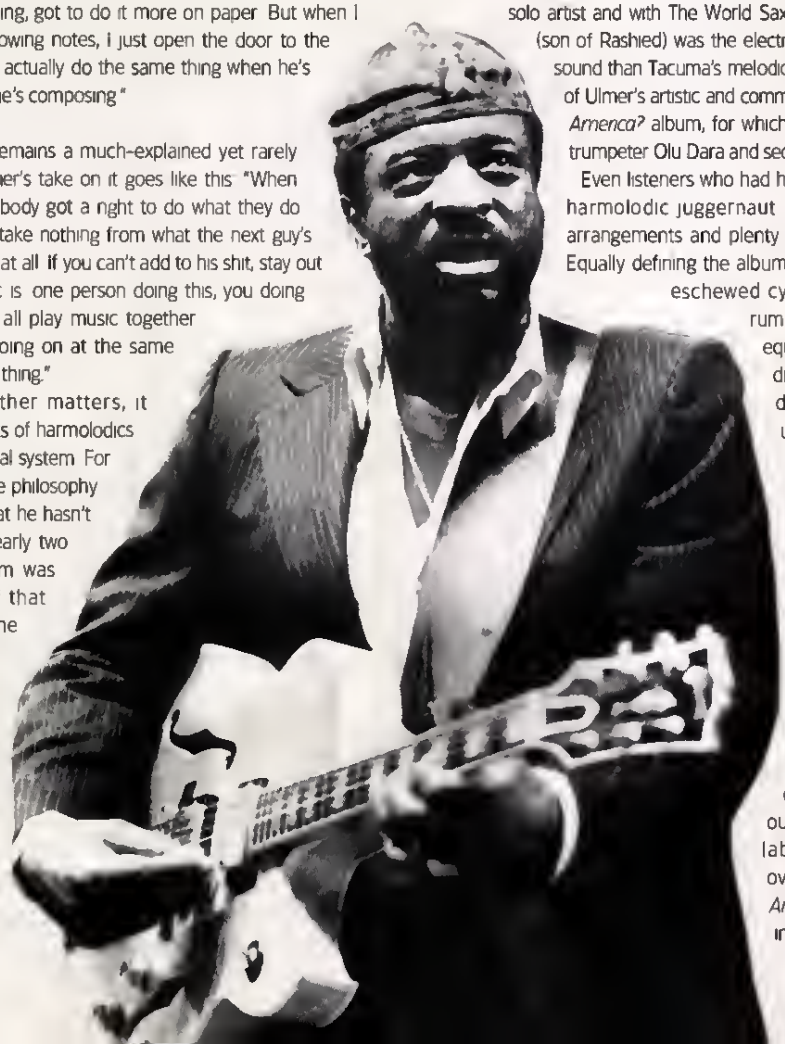
In 1975 Ulmer went out on his own The first evidence of his transformation is a 1977 studio recording with a group featuring George Adams, bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Doug Hammond, which played a limber free jazz that was clearly different from the more structured harmolodic music he was perfecting in the same period "I made that record myself and paid the musicians and everything," says Ulmer "I took the tape and let Coleman listen to it, and he said, 'No, no, I'm gonna produce your record', so we made *Tales Of Captain Black* He did everything I played with his band [drummer] Denardo [Coleman] and [bassist] Jamaaladeen [Tacuma] and him"

The album with Adams, McBee and Hammond was shelved (it wouldn't be issued until 1990, when the German label In+Out picked it up), and *Tales Of Captain Black* became Ulmer's first record as a leader, released in 1978 under the name James Blood by Coleman's Artists House label To those who heard it, the record was a revelation, a flickering, insectoid world of agitated motion that sounded unlike anything else in black music at the time

When Ulmer took this new music on tour, drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson (another Coleman alumnus who had also played with Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor) replaced Denardo, tenor saxophonist David Murray (just starting to become known as a solo artist and with The World Saxophone Quartet) replaced Coleman, and Amin Ali (son of Rashied) was the electric bassist, deploying a more bottom-heavy Fender sound than Tacuma's melodic, trebly Steinberger This was the group at the core of Ulmer's artistic and commercial breakthrough, 1979's *Are You Glad To Be In America?* album, for which the guitarist added alto saxophonist Oliver Lake, trumpeter Olu Dara and second drummer Calvin Weston

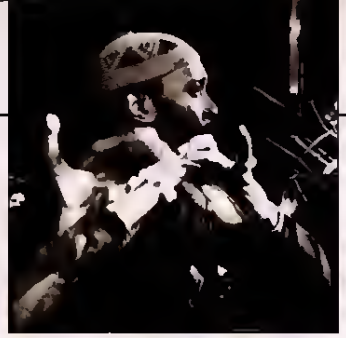
Even listeners who had heard *Captain Black* were bowled over by this new harmolodic juggernaut Ulmer's music featured fast, intricate head arrangements and plenty of solo space for himself and the horn players Equally defining the album's massive sound, Jackson and Weston generally eschewed cymbals in favour of sharp snare accents and rumbling tom-tom patterns that seemingly derived equally from US marching bands and West African drum orchestras, while bassist Ali locked into the dense polyrhythms with low end funk riffs Over, under, and twining throughout, Ulmer's whiplash guitar lines explode in sonic storms of bent notes and scrabbling strums, sometimes contrasted with bulkier wah-wah riffs. Ulmer even sings on two of the ten tracks, more evidence that his music was expanding beyond the boundaries of avant garde jazz It was fitting then that *Are You Glad To Be In America?* came out not on a jazz imprint, but on the UK indie rock label, Rough Trade

"That was the very first time I had a manager, Roger Trilling, and the manager did all that," explains Ulmer "I didn't have nothing to do with it We borrowed the money to make it ourselves, he took it to England, his friend had a label, we mixed it and remixed it, did some overdubs, and I'm singing *"Are you glad to be in America?"* over in England! That was a hit song over in England! That was my only big seller"



Right: Blood Ulmer. Far right, Blood's brothers, top to bottom: George Adams, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Rashied Ali, Ornette Coleman

PHOTO JAK KILBY









Ulmer's timing was perfect. Punk and the equally abrasive but funkier No Wave had opened rock to new sounds. So when the group toured behind the new record on the same bills and in the same venues as the era's more adventurous rock groups, they discovered bigger and more open-minded audiences than the insular jazz world could ever have offered. Certainly, audiences attuned to groups such as Public Image Ltd (who Ulmer toured with in 1980) and those on the Rough Trade roster weren't about to reject the music for being loud, funky and electric. It's no surprise that Ulmer still remembers that outfit fondly.

"Shannon was definitely harmolodic, but he wasn't playing jazz, like ding-a-ding-ding, he was playing that whole-orchestra drums, and then Calvin on top of it making it sound like it had a beat, making it sound like rock 'grrrr', a whole different sound. It was heavy rhythms. That's the band I want now. That's what I'm trying to get right now: two horns, bass, and drums, because that was the sound. That music had crossed over into itself, it was jazz and rock at the same time, in harmony."

The success of *Are You Glad To Be In America?*, and the attention it brought Ulmer, garnered him a major label deal with Columbia that produced three albums, but the sound was different. As he explains about the style of *Are You Glad*, "It's hard to play, that's what's wrong with it. You have to be a real serious musician to play it. You got to really *want* to play your instrument, to play that way. That's what the downfall of that music was. Shannon, after I played with him for a while, he got his own band [The Decoding Society]. So how am I gonna replace Shannon? You can't find no drummer like Shannon! After he left I had to use just one drummer, so the music starts going on the other side." His solution? "I actually intentionally split the music up."

Ulmer's music was now channeled down two streams: hardcore harmolodic jazz with Music Revelation Ensemble, and harmolodic funk-rock with The Black Rock Trio. At first, MRE was his regular quartet with Murray, Ali and Jackson, as heard on the 1980 *No Wave* album, but with the split, Jackson played with Ulmer only occasionally and the guitarist's regular group became the trio with Ali and Weston, augmented for the first two Columbia albums, *Free Lancing* (1981) and *Black Rock* (1982). MRE became a special-event group for select recording and European dates and gradually underwent personnel changes. In 1988, Tacuma temporarily replaced Ali for a self-titled reunion album, then Weston was replaced by drummer Cornell Rochester. Then in the mid-1990s, with Murray increasingly busy with his own projects, Ulmer began rotating a variety of saxophonists through the group, including Arthur Blythe, Hamiet Bluiett, Sam Rivers, and most recently, John Zorn and Pharoah Sanders (these latter two featured on the new *Cross Fire* album). Although Ulmer suggests that David Murray is the ideal sax player for the group, the fluid version of MRE seems to stimulate the guitarist's playing more than the set line-up ever did, perhaps because it emphasises the special-occasion aspect of the group.

Meanwhile, there was trouble with Columbia. Following the release of *Black Rock*, Ulmer says the label was trying to get him to record Bruce Springsteen and Jimi Hendrix songs. In reaction, he delivered a radically different album by a trio of himself, violinist Charles Burnham and drummer Warren Benbow, with whom Ulmer had played as far back as 1975. Ironically, this album, *Odyssey*, sold the most of his three Columbia records, and is the only one the label has seen fit to reissue on CD.

"The Odyssey band came in after Shannon left," Ulmer explains. "I had that group with Calvin and Amin, I played out on gigs with a trio and didn't add no horns. Then when I'd make a record I'd add whatever I needed. But when Shannon left I didn't use the horns [in concert], I stopped trying to make that sound. After awhile Amin and the drummer, they just wanted to quit the band, they wanted to change. So I said, I'll get a band this time where I don't need the bass, I'll eliminate the bass, try and get a whole new sound. I got away from Western tuning and didn't tune up regular for four years. I played in that harmolodic tuning, in unison, with Warren and Charlie for four years."

In effect, Ulmer took harmolodics to its logical conclusion. "My basic tuning is unison tuning, tuning all the strings to the same note. Then what makes it different is the gauge. If you've got two strings, but the E-string gauge is 13 and your sixth string has a gauge of 46, the A on that string will sound different than the A on the 13 string. It's the equivalent of three people singing the same note but their tone, their sound is different. You actually have a three-octave thing, same as if you tuned regular, so it works." One effect of the unison tuning was that the music became structured around drones — part of the reason a bassist was superfluous, and the defining characteristic of the trio.

"That was the best experience that happened to me," Ulmer continues. "Everything I thought about the guitar was real, that I could turn away from the Western music system and still be related to that playing music, which I was worrying about, because sometimes if you tune away, people say you ain't playing music, so at least I was still getting the feedback that I was still playing music. So I had proven that the tuning was different than Western music and I didn't have to go back Western if I didn't want to. Then after I wore them out, I had to tune my guitar back, I found that everybody else I played with didn't match that either. I couldn't get no one else to match that sound with Warren and Charlie, because it was special. Still is." Which is why Ulmer is delighted that the trio has been reunited, 15 years after its first appearance, for a new album, *Reunion*, that marks a rare US release for the guitarist.

However epochal it seems now, *Odyssey* was the last straw for Columbia, and Ulmer began recording mostly for German and Japanese labels, though there were welcome exceptions when fan/producer Bill Laswell would sell one-off projects to US labels, such as the 1997 Third Rail album *South Delta Space Age*, which came out on the Island subsidiary Antilles and teamed Ulmer with a group featuring Bernie Worrell, Amina Claudine Myers and The Meters' legendary drummer Ziggy Modeliste. The dichotomy between Ulmer's jazz and rock sides has become more pronounced, with albums by Music Revelation Ensemble and the fitfully convened Phalanx (which emerged when George Adams joined the reunited Black Rock Trio but didn't want to go under that name, later, Phalanx became Ulmer, Adams, Rashied Ali and bassist Sirone) being recorded mostly by Japan's DIW label. For more popular consumption, Ulmer has concocted The Blues Experience, where he sings in his trademark mumbling, mush-mouthed way — but not, despite the name, blues. Ulmer denies emphatically playing the sort of music normally categorised as blues, which he refers to as "forbidden blues". "See, I won't do no shit like that," he says. "I feel like my Daddy would kill me. It's a subconscious thing, I know he won't, but. " In fact Ulmer claims he has only recorded two 12-bar blues, "Jazz Is The Teacher, Blues Is The Preacher" and "Crying". "I'm trying not to play that way," he explains, "but to get that same feeling. My Blues Experience thing could be anything, church music, jazz music, but just how it feels, the blues feeling that makes you think of some part of your cultural life, help you remember what you've forgotten." □ *The Odyssey Band's* Reunion *is out now on Knitting Factory (through New Note/Pinnacle). The Music Revelation Ensemble's* Cross Fire *is out now on DIW (through Harmonia Mundi). A new album by Third Rail is scheduled for release later this year on Antilles.*

PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM: JEAN-MARC BIRRAUX, CHRISTIAN HIM, VAL WILMER, JEAN-MARC BIRRAUX



Kim Gordon

notes from

Sonic Youth need no introduction as the most influential rock group since The
a new album, and hears how they've kept their underground roots alive,

Eighteen years down the line, Sonic Youth have finally come of age. Arriving at the stage where most groups hate each other's guts and only communicate through lawyers about dividing their shared assets, Thurston Moore, Lee Ranaldo, Kim Gordon and Steve Shelley are committing themselves longterm via the establishment of a new Sonic Youth studio. Further proof of how the group take life ass-backwards, and in defiance of those commentators who gave up on them when they signed to Geffen in 1990, their new album *A Thousand Leaves* ranks alongside their best work, and contains their most freewheeling music since "Expressway To Yr Skull".

The release of *A Thousand Leaves* follows the recent cycle of three EPs, issued on their own Sonic Youth Records label. The fact the EPs came out on an independent signalled a remarkable degree of autonomy for a group signed to an American major. More valuably, they reasserted Sonic Youth's commitment to fullblown rock experiment, and offered intimate glimpses of a group rediscovering the pleasure and power of improvisation as a thing in itself, rather than as a jamming aid to songwriting. If the first EP sounded tentative, by SYR3 they brought in a wild card element in the form of Chicago multi-instrumentalist Jim O'Rourke. The gamble paid off. SYR3 is, at 56 minutes, the longest and most challenging of the cycle.

Intended as postcards detailing works in progress, the EPs are a new manifesto for free music. By contrast, the main strength of *A Thousand Leaves* is its introspection. Melancholy is not a mood you immediately associate with Sonic Youth. However, it becomes them, for melancholy brakes their rush to the thrash guitar climax, reflection requires them to slowly and fully explore every nuance of texture and mood.

Melancholy also needs time to fulfil its artistic prerogative. The group can afford to indulge their introspective tendencies since they installed themselves in their new studio. "It really takes the pressure off," remarks drummer Steve Shelley, "when you're not looking at that clock thinking we just spent 100 dollars while somebody was tuning a guitar. Well, here we are not on the clock. It's ours round the clock."

Located high up in a low rise in the lower depths of Manhattan, where the streets run out of numbers and start acquiring unfashionable names, the studio overlooks a dowdy workaday neighbourhood, with little to offer by way of distraction. The interior decor won't win Thurston Moore any design awards for the way he has papered most of the available wallspace from his massive collection of posters and concert flyers. But together with the SY memorabilia scattered throughout, they make up an evocative panorama documenting the history of Sonic Youth and the various scenes that preceded, paralleled, inspired or followed them. Leaping off the wall are the



underground

Velvet Underground. In New York, Biba Kopf meets the four members as they prepare to release with a bunch of side projects, a new indie label, and a dose of free Improv. Photography: Magda

names and faces that constitute Sonic Youth's pantheon of peers, gods, co-conspirators and monsters Patti Smith, No Wavers Mars and DNA, Glenn Branca, Black Flag, Swans, Einsturzende Neubauten, Keiji Haino and so on

The studio clock might belong to Sonic Youth but time is not entirely their own (or ours) The following discussion is a composite the interviews with Steve Shelley and Lee Ranaldo were done separately at the group's studio, snatched between photo calls and their evening's appointments The more relaxed, extended talk with Thurston Moore followed in the apartment he shares with Kim Gordon, their four year old daughter Coco and Thurston's Mt Rushmore of a record collection Arriving later, Kim's attempts to get a few more words in were prematurely curtailed by the demands of parenthood

How did Sonic Youth Records come about?

Steve We took a few months off [last] summer, after *Washing Machine*, so we started setting this place up [referring to the studio] We did this film soundtrack for Richard Linklater, *Suburbia*, and we were just getting our groundings in here It was the first recording that we had done in here, and we started with those EPs last year They were coming out of the first rehearsals going towards this album [*A Thousand Leaves*], and I don't know, everybody taking a week off here and there to go and play with other people.

SYR is something that we all have a collective say in, I just take care of getting it manufactured and distributed But we all decide together that we're going to play with Jim O'Rourke, or whether we are going to have a different artist on SYR

We knew that we wanted to do a sort of postcard series, we wanted them to be really immediate, put them out and not even worry about Geffen, because they wouldn't even be able to keep up with our output. We wanted them to be vinyl and CD, and we know that's a hassle for a major label Mostly we were thinking along the lines of an instrumental series, but not strictly So those were the ground rules, pretty much

What was the gameplan when you recorded with Jim O'Rourke?

Steve Thurston said, come up to the studio some time, which is our pickup line now with anybody come by the studio for a while, cut some tracks Jim came and we played a couple of hours, and after playing I was thinking to myself, oh, I don't think we captured it there A week or two later we start playing the tapes, we'd kind of forgotten about it, didn't ever listen to it, and we were real happy with what we heard We were mixing it for five or six days, trying to chop the thing down, but could never chop it down and feel as happy with it as we were with the 56 minute version So we did a DMM master for the vinyl and crammed 56 minutes onto a CD and called it an EP, even though it is longer than most albums

Jim didn't bring a guitar or anything He just came in, took something off the shelf He played drums on one song while I was playing vibes and Kim was playing trumpet. I haven't been able to tell anybody in a country that would matter, but I am playing a little cheap turntable that we have with the *Wibling Rivalry* record, the Oasis brothers arguing, sort of like the Jesus & Mary Chain not record, I think it's put by the same guy I had Thurston's copy, and I was spinning it backwards. A lot of people hear SY3 and go, Ah, there's trumpet, Jim must have played trumpet. No, that's Kim Or they assume that Jim's playing vibes No, that's me, he's on drums

How did Geffen respond to you releasing records on your own independent label?

Steve Someone at Geffen asked if this was something that's going to be a hit single or whatever Er, we don't think so And someone else was concerned if it was going to have beats on it, HipHop beats, dance beats And we were, like, well, not exactly

Lee In the back of our minds we knew that there was a lot riding on the move to Geffen — credibility more than anything else Do you make that move and take your fanbase with you or do they all turn their heads yelling sell out? I think those first Geffen albums [*Goo*, *Dirty*] showed that we felt a bit of that pressure The guy who signed us, Gary Gersh, instilled that pressure in a subtle kind of way You knew that he was expecting something that had MAJOR LABEL PRODUCT stamped on it, and no matter how much you try and ignore it there's no doubt it filtered in a little bit.

Steve Geffen are like, we don't really understand what's going on on that other side of the band, but. they never hassle us about any of that. It's pretty special We don't rely on them a whole lot, we're pretty independent still

Did signing to Geffen consciously change the way you approach making music?

Lee From *Bad Moon Rising* to *Daydream Nation* we had really been crafting these sets of music, performing wise, that were geared towards long extended pieces, where one song would segue into the next, as though it was a continuous body of music We reached the end of that way of working around the time we signed to Geffen It was almost a coincidence that our first Geffen record [1990's *Goo*] had shorter, more songform things on it At first, I think people read the shift coming from us being on a major label, [but] we wanted to write shorter pop songs we really go through pendulum-like cycles where we like long or crazy things or shorter, more encapsulated things, and *Goo* was really one of those periods where we were just naturally writing shorter songs and stopping after every song in concert.

Kim At the time of *Dirty* [1992] we were very conflicted We never wanted to be looked at as a novelty act.

Thurston Art rockers

Kim Reacting against that led us eventually to what became *Dirty*, which was our most rock record After that we just didn't want to pursue that anymore

Thurston But even on *Dirty* we were doing textural compositions that didn't rock. I don't think we were fooling ourselves into thinking it would really appeal to straight rock audiences But we were working in an arena where rock was becoming a huge thing There was underground rock, later to be called alternative — this is before Nirvana really broke through — and we were into that, we were into Mudhoney and that post-Hardcore thing We were still into being really wild and freaking people out with what we were doing, but we always thought about this music we'd done, be it *Confusion Is Sex* or *Bad Moon Rising* well, imagine what it would sound like with Aerosmith's producers It wasn't so much an ambition as a fantasy this music produced in that fashion would be really amazing to hear When we did *Dirty* I distinctly remember Courtney Love saying, 'Your record's going to be massive' I thought, well that would be great and weird if it did, but it did not.

Kim Nor did we think it ever really would be

Thurston But people in that position did, because alternative was happening, and now it was going to happen to us, they said And we were saying, no, no, no, come down to earth everybody, because what happened was a very exclusive situation to Nirvana, and what came after was more cosmetic than Nirvana

We recorded *Dirty* just after touring with Neil Young Neil wanted bands that would



Steve Shelley

challenge and freak his audience out, which we were definitely doing. I think he really liked us, he could see what we were trying to do, but the audience, well, no they were not freaked out or challenged.

Kim: Some of them were downright rednecks. Just because you're a hippy doesn't mean you're really enlightened. It just means you've smoked pot. Also, I think Neil had won a lot of really conservative people over with that hit "Rocking In The Free World". It's like that Bruce Springsteen song ["Born In The USA"] in that it could be taken the wrong way as a tribute or something. Talk about not being able to control your audience's reaction to your music.

Do Geffen have any particular expectations for the album, now they've heard it?

Lee: I really don't know what to make of such career curve expectations anymore. I feel more removed or divorced from the whole notion of MTV/radio culture, that whole big rock thing, than I ever have before. So my expectations for this record are really the most simple. We are going to go out and play interesting shows, built almost almost entirely of music written in the last year. Here we are, 18 years in, and we are going out and playing music almost exclusively written this year.

Around the time of Lollapalooza [the US-wide tour organised by Perry Farrell of Porno For Pyros, headlined by Sonic Youth, and documented on the video *1991 The Year Punk Broke*], and for a few years after that we really made an effort to play songs from various periods, we wanted to draw from all different parts of this broad spectrum of work, because we really thought it would please the audience. But we don't want to do that anymore. We want to be a current band and exist alongside the young bands that we hang out with, or that we like to see playing and are only on their first or second record, so you judge them on their current repertoire.

How has having your own studio affected your working methods?

Lee: A year ago we recorded the first stuff here, which was the music for *Suburbia*, and actually the song "Sunday" on our new album was originally written for that film, although we re-recorded it.

We got into this strange habit: we started writing all these long instrumental pieces. Well, that's not that abnormal for us, but we didn't take them that final step of applying vocals to them. Instead, we felt like playing them out instrumentally. Things started to grow out of that: we decided to start doing the SYR series, and all of a sudden all these avenues to move in opened up through what we were creating here.

Our writing process is the four of us in a room just playing. It's pretty much go in there, turn on the amps and start making noise, and then it slowly channels into something. Now we have got this place, whenever we are rehearsing we can make studio quality sound. We can play for two hours, [engineer] Wharton Tiers would be taping stuff, then we'd bounce back and forth off the tape machine, listen to what we did, play it again, revise it, edit, juxtapose, build stuff up that way.

Basically we're after capturing stuff as close as possible to that point where it actually gels for the first time. Once you get there, the most usual step is, you refine it, chip away at it in minuscule ways for, like, two months, and then you record it properly, when everyone knows where they are supposed to be at any particular point, when it is almost robotic. Everything's been codified and it's not really living music anymore.

We have really been loving the way something sounds that first time it comes together — not in every case, naturally. On the last record [*Washing Machine*] we actually used a couple of things from our old eight track studio or whatever, because we really didn't think we'd be able to better them, not in terms of playing per se, but just in terms of some nebulous or evanescent emotional content, when you can hear there's something really happening. Not every note is in place, but there is *live* interaction. After listening to all the later takes, we realised they all sounded like we were trying to get back to that original something, so usually for us those first takes are the best. You might tinker with guitar tracks later, all that stuff, which is kind of OK, but it's not like the tinkering improves it tenfold. Anyway, I don't think we have the temperament or the mindset to really spend long periods in the studio perfecting things. We have always preferred playing live together. That was one of the wonderful





things about early rock 'n' roll records, like Buddy Holly's or Elvis Presley's you heard a group of people interacting in a room with a microphone in the centre There may have been flubs, but some quality in music made that way was lost when people started breaking the recording process down into overdubbing tracks

Did CD sound and longer playing times encourage you to let introspection run its course?

Lee CDs are really sticky in that regard because I tend not to like overlong albums A 40–45 minute album is really about the perfect length for an album, yet here we've come up with one that's almost as long as *Daydream Nation* — and that was specifically meant as a double album But some music needs a certain amount of time to unfold, and recently we have been loving immersing ourselves in longer pieces of music

How come the men get to be sensitive on this album, and Kim does all the tough stuff?

Lee It's interesting that it has turned out that way; if it wasn't for Kim's songs it would be a very introspective record Thurston and I have retreated from it to some degree Kim's the rocker, there is no doubt about it.

Kim Since I have been playing with Julie [Cafritz] in Free Kitten I have got more interested in the guitar I guess the easiest way to free up the band to push things around was for me to play more guitar It was never intended to be so formatted, you know, two guitars, bass and drums I like playing the bass, but it's hard to think of some things to play on the bass It's lighter

Sometimes it falls apart a little more, but Steve is always there When I first started I used to play bass through a guitar amp, and now I play guitar through a bass amp

Lee It was very conscious on my part The kinds of things I was interested in saying at this point were not inappropriate but they weren't going to be like loud, rock projecting kinds of things, but they were going to be on a much smaller scale relating to specific people and events that I have recently crossed paths with

"Hits Of Sunshine" on the new album is dedicated to Allen Ginsberg.

Lee We have all had some involvement with Allen Ginsberg in the last couple of years, and I had gotten to be fairly good friends with him before he died You could make a lot of cases for his influence on the culture of the last half of this century Like the hippies, well, those Beats were taking peyote in the 40s, writing about it in the 50s, and people were discovering that in the 60s And there was also him being openly homosexual, a whole host of things The scope of his career and his place in cultural history is incredible, and it's astounding how he was so involved for so long, from Congressional LSD hearings to all kinds of crazy stuff, not just wigged out hippy, but cross the boards kind of stuff

Steve It's one of my favourites. While mixing it, we were all comparing it to which hippy band we felt it sounded like Of course, I thought it sounded like Neil Young and Crazy Horse, and Lee said it sounded like The Grateful Dead, and somebody thought it sounded like Moby Grape, or whatever.

Lee The thing we liked about "Hits Of Sunshine" was how it was so empty There is very little going on, it's like a long, empty landscape, sometimes with a little guitar figure, but it doesn't have that crazy, broiling barrage of music that we love so much as a liberating thing This track is the other side of that, a long trancey thing, a bassline and drumbeat repeating over and over You could project from that one to Quicksilver Messenger Service or Grateful Dead

What about projecting out from Sonic Youth: what music do you currently feel connected to?

Lee There's a network of people who are playing spontaneous composition or improvisation, just playing for small groups of people, and that's some of the most interesting stuff right now A lot of people have lost interest in the notion of major bands, or even the indie rock band, and are looking for other avenues for interesting music making You get all these Electronica people, everyone from Aphex Twin to the side closest to us, and some of those guys are looking back to Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, that interesting period in modern music that is not like a 1970s trend thing It's interesting that people are searching around for other places to dip in and get inspiration from It's happening right now, not just in the US but everywhere People are trying to find other ways of music making that is not traditional song form Or at least the people we are interested in hearing are

Thurston We're trying to figure out what happened that made avant garde music, be it classical, jazz or rock, the music of choice for the hip cognoscenti of young listeners



Lee Ranaldo

Such as the people who shop at [New York record store] Other Music

Did you find any answers?

Kim I think it has to do with the approaching end of the millennium People are suddenly becoming more interested in spiritual things, and trying to combine that interest with technology There's this re-assessment going on in the culture to decide what is really important. Also, this area is the last thing to be mined

Thurston I'm talking about how a store like Other Music can open up and be packed with people every day buying Xenakis CDs, looking for Milford Graves rarities What is up with that? That is a very recent hysteria within the underground I see it as being part and parcel with DJ culture, Ambient or whatever I also saw it as a reaction to the commodification of punk rock. After Nirvana it was completely blown out, its musical framework completely debased after their success, and all that is left in its wake is the hideous demon that is Green Day That is when you first started noticing a proliferation of lo-fi recordings, or the romanticisation of lo-fi recordings, and people looking to cassettes for something new and inventive and creative in the face of the prevailing professionalism of punk rock in the wake of Nirvana

Now in the 90s there are all these underground factions, be it lo-fi tape culture, the uprising of Japanese noise music, and all the forays into free music improvisation by all these groups all over the world I am talking about groups like The Dead C They're not really like Evan Parker or Derek Bailey, but they play purely improvisational compositions To me The Dead C were so radical, putting out records early on that consisted of a sort of thrumbling sound made through these guitars and drums, and had nothing to do with the standard free improvisation

I asked Bruce [Russell, of The Dead C], where did you get the name Xpressway, and he said, you ought to know, mate It was from "Expressway To Yr Skull", which had an open-ended kind of vibe That he took that part of our playing and made it the whole of what they were going to do, well, I was completely enamoured by it.

The Dead C, and all the bands who are following Dead C, are the best bands right now

Can you justify that claim?

Thurston Because they're asking themselves what are they doing getting involved with free music, getting involved with texture and things like this, and finding out there is a history to it, and it is avant garde music They find out about modal jazz, and they find out about Cage and so on All these groups investigating all these sophisticated concepts, well, I haven't seen that before

I sort of see Ambient culture as music that has something to do with Minimalism in the face of a culture that is more chaotic. People involved in experimental or avant garde music are moving towards drone music, meditational music, repetition Tony Conrad's music has become important after 35 years Then there is the rediscovery of Krautrock, which dealt with a lot of that. It's akin to society wanting to discover spiritual values because of the [information] overload Who knows what's going on, who fucking cares? I think Burroughs had it right the shithouse is going to blow, he says, I see the future and the future is violent. It's definitely interesting seeing the world in transition to another century, specially in America where there is a new found spiritualism in the face of chaotic dischord, which is why underground music culture has become so involved with experimentalism

Do you see any continuity between today's improvising underground and yesterday's alternatives?

Thurston To me Hardcore was such a genuine movement in America in the early 80s The funny thing is we don't have much relationship with the [alternative rock] market, Pearl Jam, Red Hot Chilli Peppers we know these people, we have been on the same festival bill with them, but we don't see us going in the same lateral direction as them But I always liked it because I always thought it was absurdist that Lollapalooza asked us to headline Yeah, of course we would do that. Lollapalooza paid a lot of bills for Sonic Youth Suddenly there is this sort of underground music scene that exists, and I feel like in a way it has come full circle, it's like the field of music that we were working in has now become this wider field of music within the underground, and I feel that we can go there, work there and play there and yet maintain our massive popularity! Without feeling like, hey, this is so uncool to be popular, whereas I say, it is kind of cool that we are popular If we weren't popular and we were playing in the back of a room after doing it for 20 years, it would be hell If

things didn't develop that way, and instead became completely stagnant, and there wasn't an experimentalist underground, with Ambient, DJ culture, free improvisation and everything, I wonder where we would be. Would we be just this weird thing that had always existed, making weird records? But our whole thing was that we never wanted to feel like we were buying into that thing, though what we're doing complemented that scene very well, possibly more now than ever. For me it feels really great putting our new record out in that context.

So how do you see things progressing from here?

Thurston Everything's allowed now and those who are enlightened enough know there is no hierarchy here. So what can we do? We just do what we do and it's kind of beautiful, and we owe a debt to free improvisation, which is, like, the bedrock here. But what's going to happen? Who cares? You shouldn't have any anxiety about it. Once I saw a contemporary composer who used to record for Glenn Branca's Neutral label stumbling around the street late at night, and I asked, 'What are you doing?' And he answered, 'I can't sleep, I don't know what is going to happen to 20th century music.' He was just freaked out by this anxiety: where is composition going? And there I was, 18, saying, I don't know, I'm just looking for this girl. I never want to reach that level of anxiety.

But I am glad we're older. I am more appreciative in a way, being an older musician looking at what 20 year old musicians are doing in experimental music. I've spent the last six years playing with improvisors, which I never did when I was younger, back in the SST days in the 80s, when we were just being Sonic Youth in a van touring around the world.

Last year I played with Cecil Taylor, which was very enjoyable. And I played for Merce Cunningham's dance company. And now I'm working with Milford Graves on duo stuff — and nobody has a dialogue with Milford Graves. He teaches up at this school and one of his pupils kept bugging him that he should do stuff with this guy from Sonic Youth. He finally gave in, so this pupil picked me up and we went down into Milford Graves's basement and he had all these bags of dried herbs, skeletons, the same drum-kit he has had since 1963, painted in African colours. He said, You just sit down there and I'll record it on this video camera, or something. So we started to play and it was really happening. For me that is the most exciting thing imaginable at the moment.

At the same time I've strayed away from playing just that world of free improvisation and doing more stuff with younger people on the noise scene. I'm working above worlds, in a way, not adhering myself to one scene or the other. That's what I want to do, blur that line by not calling myself a free improvisor or whatever. In fact I don't call myself anything. Fortunately Sonic Youth is a form that allows each of us to do different kinds of self rewarding music, and that is very instrumental in us maturing as a band. It allows us to let our life experiences as people growing older to be mirrored in the band. We all have our private worlds, Lee going out, me going out, Kim with her other bands, and Steve working with different people.

Do your various side projects have anything to do with you getting along so well, after all this time?

Lee I don't know, sometimes it is hard to figure out. We just never allowed the ego side of things, or the fame and starstruck kind of things to blow up to the point where they got in the way. It's possible that the fact that we have never had any major success in any bigtime way has helped us in a sense. There has never been this crazy peak whereby if you don't live up to it next time you feel like you are getting lesser and lesser. We have always had this steady incline and it has suited us perfectly. We really have about the most ideal situation that any band could have on any level. We are not millionaires like the Stones, but as far as a creative situation, we are able to release major label records and get worldwide attention and release these little records on our own label, and play these 200 seat clubs if we want, singly or in pairs or whatever, or play 30,000 seat venues with Neil Young or whoever. So it has turned out to be an ideal situation for who we are and how we like to operate. It has turned out really great. □ *A Thousand Leaves is released this month by Geffen (through BMG). SYR releases are distributed through Cargo. For more Sonic Youth, see Thurston Moore's Epiphany on page 82.*



Thurston Moore

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Mark Sinker reopens the music vs technology debate with **Robert Moog**, who invented the portable modular synthesizer to give the world an ever expanding index of musical possibilities. Not so, said composer Pierre Boulez, claiming the synthesizer's open access to an infinity of sound has resulted in musical banality. Moog photography: Eva Vermandel

a huge, ever pulsating brain

In 1969 Walter Carlos's *Trans-Electronic Music Productions Inc* [illegible] *Switched-On Bach* went gold for Columbia Records — for a long time, [illegible] maybe even now, it was the best-selling classical LP release. Later that year, French composer Pierre Boulez, in a notorious interview prefacing his stint as conductor of The New York Philharmonic, described the fascination with electronics exhibited by West Coast-based composers such as Morton Subotnick and Ramon Sender, founders of the San Francisco Tape Music Centre, as no more than "gimmickry". As for recording Bach on a synthesizer, this showed an "appallingly low level of thinking".

For Robert Moog, however, whose still-experimental voltage-controlled modular instrument the synthesizer in question happened to be, *Switched-On Bach* was the record that changed everything. "I was chairman of this session of the Audio Engineering Society, November 1968, where I described using a multitrack recorder with a modular synthesizer," he explains. "And when they allowed me to play a track from *Switched-On Bach*, which would be coming out a month later, I can remember this roomful of cynical audio engineers, used to all sorts of scams and shams and to people with no talent, there were *tears* in their eyes . I still remember that. It was a breakthrough. Nobody thought it could be a medium where real musical talent could come through."

In March this year, I gave a talk on aspects of the Theremin at London's Lux Cinema as part of an event called *Interference*, the first in a series of themed music forums co-hosted by *The Wire*. Afterwards I was asked, "When will it be taken seriously?" Off-the-cuff, I replied, never. That this applies (as I believe) to the Moog also, is not meant dismissively. On the contrary, it's in such *un*seriousness that the peculiar subversive

Robert Moog







Above: IRCAM's Pierre Boulez.
Right: Wendy (née Walter) Carlos

force of these devices resides. Something more than their bizarre names is enough, still, to unsettle notions of what constitutes seriousness. Clearly impossible as authentic instrumentation, they remain exotic, even deep in electronic music territory.

As it happens, it wasn't a Moog but a cheaper UK rival, the EMS VCS3, that Eno used to conjure up those infuriating, yet intoxicating anti-R&B squiggles in Roxy Music's first recordings, while in Pere Ubu, Allen Ravenstine's use of an EML synthesizer (probably the ElectroComp 101) provided the group's 1978 debut album *The Modern Dance* with its utopian-realist sound dialectic. Out of knob twiddling and seaweed clusters of patch-wire connected modular units, these cousins of the Moog offered glimpses of loopy alien possibility and freedom during two particularly constrained and dispirited periods of pop. With their daft backdrop blurps and sighs, they signalled — out of making do and straight kitsch — a newly brainy sex energy.

The object in question

EMS VCS3? EML ElectroComp 101? Let's face it, not so many people have given their birthname to the world famous instrument they invented. There's Leon Theremin and Leo Fender, obviously, and possibly Maurice 'Ondes' Martenot. Robert Moog (pronounce it to rhyme with vogue) is another. These days Moog is bemusedly savouring a mini-stardom denied most 64 year old electrical engineers. Having begun his career selling Theremins — for years providing the only outlet for this now legendary music machine — he seems to have circled right back to his own beginnings, though the Theremin model he now promotes is MIDI compatible, incorporating 40 years of his own design improvements.

Born in Flushing, New York in 1934, of Dutch-Polish-Jewish ancestry, Moog was already making "simple hobby-projects making musical sounds" by the time he was 11. "I always thought of myself as an engineer," he explains. "I had piano lessons, I did read music and knew the fundamentals, but I never thought of myself as becoming a professional musician. I thought of myself as becoming a professional engineer." By 14, he had built his first Theremin, DIY being the only way to get hold of one in the 1940s. By 19, he had written a build-your-own Theremin article, and was soon making and selling them as a way to support his new family. He went to Cornell University in 1958 to study Engineering Physics, completing his doctorate in 1965. In the meantime, he wrote a second article in 1961, featuring suggestions for the transistorised redesign of the Theremin. *Electronics World* made it their cover feature and that year he sold $50,000 worth of kits.

In 1963 Moog teamed up with one Herb Deutsch, who was interested in the transistor-based voltage control of oscillators, amplifiers and filters as the basis of a new species of electronic instrument, which would be *modular*, which is to say, potentially small and even portable, as well as highly adaptable. In theory at least,

PHOTO OF WENDY CARLOS: EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS



Ramon Sender and Morton Subotnick

Moog and Deutsch's initiative would allow composer musicians to patch together a pick 'n' mix synthesizer from the modules their specific projects required, not in a way predetermined by classical music theory, but however they wanted

In a handsome new office at the top of an electronic music store in central London, with an equally handsome new Theremin standing nearby, I ask Robert Moog if, in tackling these very specific music engineering problems, he had any notion of the kinds of future musics his inventions made possible "No, the opposite is true," he replies "We wanted to make it as general as possible I think that that was one of the engineering problems we faced how to make the pitch change in such a way that it wasn't limited to a particular set of scales, or set of pitches, that it could facilitate a musical gesture that was well understood, the sort of gestures a violinist uses to play standard classical music"

These were not generalisations ordinarily called for in pop music?

"My first customers were not pop musicians at all They were experimental musicians For instance, the people at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Centre did not *want* keyboards They wanted things as general as possible Their idea of control was to have push-buttons, to turn something on and off, and they would set what it was to be turned on and off And people like John Cage [Moog built 12 special Theremins for Cage and Merce Cunningham's 1965 multimedia piece *Variations V*, which Cunningham activated by dancing] just wanted to avoid any reference *at all* to conventional classical music."

I ask if this kind of requirement was easier for a problem-solving engineer to work with, or harder He chuckles "I wouldn't call it easy To the extent I had any music at all I had classical training I was learning on the job what it was to be an experimental musician"

By 1964, transistor-based technology was evolving, and Moog had delivered a paper to the 16th annual convention of the Audio Engineering Society titled "Voltage-Controlled Electronic Music Modules" Soon, several electronic music studios custom-designed by Moog existed, in America and beyond By 1967, he had enough orders to make it worthwhile committing himself full time to a business, and began hiring

The vast dreamtime

In Arthur C Clarke's mid-50s short story *The Nine Billion Names of God*, a mainframe computer, programmed by Tibetans, speedily effects all the divine letter-permutations, so bringing an end to the cosmos In the 1956 movie *The Forbidden Planet*, the technology of the vanished inhabitants of Altair 4, the Krel, ie 8000 cubic miles of mind-amplifying transformers, had brought into being a civilisation "without physical instrumentality", unwittingly unleashing Monsters from the Krel Id, and shattering a "million years of shining sanity" in one night of sin What drove such visions of technology-triggered Armageddon?

The post-war years were the dreamtime for electronic music-machinery, but calculators were the size of city blocks — in 1946, the ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator And Computer) weighed 30 tons, and its 8000 valves raised room temperature to 120° — and sci-fi writers worried that machines, intended to save labour for mankind, would quickly outstrip humanity to give God a run for his money (on live TV in 1951, UNIVAC, the first 'commercial' computer, appeared to predict Eisenhower's presidential victory as human pundits looked on and mocked — until the results started coming in)

In music, such technological giganticism had problematic psycho-cultural knock-on effects the vision prevailed of vast, building-sized set-ups producing all possible sound-colours and melodies and rhythms, and all placed under the control of the composer, who thus became his own orchestra Prior to its arrival, and for years after it, the synthesizer was conceptualised as the instrument without limitations, ending all the awkward pre-modernist composer compromises over instrumental range or relative power/audibility, over effective speed of articulation, over simple availability

In 1956, the year RCA demonstrated its self-contained, programmable sound synthesizer, and with the aid of substantial Rockefeller Foundation grants, tape music pioneers Vladimir Ussachevsky and Otto Luening, of Columbia University, and composer Milton Babbitt, of Princeton, established a permanent centre for electronic music, with full research access for the music departments of both establishments Fully staffed and equipped with 19 loudspeakers and a control console, it was funded to allow composers to work for free for five years

In January 1959, the RCA-Columbia Synthesizer Mark I arrived at the centre Within the year, the improved Mark II was installed In essence a large room you walked into and worked inside, the Mark II had two keyboards, sawtooth and white noise generators, mic inputs, amplitude modulators, filters, mixing amps, glissandi controls and various resonators Compared with the methods employed at electronic music studios such as Stockhausen's in Cologne or Pierre Schaeffer's in Paris, which involved painstaking months of cutting and pasting filtered and taped oscillator noise, the RCA-Columbia synthesizer allowed the user to pre-program, by means of knob settings, the pitch, volume, duration, attack, decay, overtones and general tone colour for each separate note as it arrived — though this sometimes still took days In addition, whole series of notes could be programmed to play forward or backward, fast or slow Computers seemed perfect for approaching composition parametrically that is, breaking each element down into its characteristics As a result, Babbitt, an analytic serialist self-trained to listen to sound parametrically, soon wrested aesthetic control of the centre's work from tape recorder experts Ussachevsky and Luening.

> **"In the 60s everybody was nuts, out there stretching the boundaries of what you call music. I think there's a lull now"**

In May 1961 works by Babbitt, Luening and Ussachevsky, as well as younger composers from across the globe, were played before an invited audience at the centre, and for a season or three, Columbia-Princeton was a focus for forward-looking musicians — including a budding young composer called Walter (later Wendy) Carlos

But already this settlement had its discontents In the early years of the century, serialism, a rigorously mathematical form of composition pioneered by Anton Webern, which had initially influenced Subotnick, foregrounded patterns of tone colour by reducing pitch patterns to mere restless permutation Yet because the paperwork this required was a slog, the intended endpoint, 'melodies' of timbre, were often muffled by discussion of the means Though computer calculation vastly speeded the maths, it didn't so much give composers more time for non-computer creativity, as encourage them into computing ever-finer calculation detail Indeed, Babbitt was often quoted as insisting that the true subject of modern music was not timbre but the interplay of pitch relationships This was typical of the post-war serialists, who already had a habit

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CCM ARCHIVE, MILLS COLLEGE

of rationalising away serialism's failings as virtues as the self-appointed guardians of music against the onslaught of both market pop and socio-cultural imperatives, composers like Babbitt were content to amass state funding and retreat into their bunkers, taking music with them

So the general public were excluded, not just from soundlabs such as Columbia-Princeton (where, yes, they *might* have knocked over retorts and broken test tubes), but also from the invitation-only concerts. Asked in 1958 to justify his work, Babbitt had delivered an essay to *High Fidelity* magazine which insisted this was music as pure research (as a result, *High Fidelity* rather cheekily titled the piece "Who Cares If You Listen?") The fear was palpable what if listeners turned up, and dismissed as rubbish all that had so far been achieved?

Well, OK, maybe pleasing the audience is a mere sop to commercialism But what about having to *engage* them? And as for the kind of cityblock-sized music-machine installed at Columbia-Princeton, wasn't this just a rationalisation of the composer's fear of performing musicians? As Tony Conrad told me in 1994, referring to the Mark II synth "You had to be part of the group to get to use the instruments, much in the way that if the church has an organ, it doesn't mean that you can go play it, if you



Moog with Keith Emerson, 1974

suck up to the church you can play it. The institutionalisation of these instruments as research phenomena was a little bit painful, but it got me to thinking about what was wrong with all this I guess the thing that hit me most forcefully is that I really think that it's important to try and figure out *who* was designing *what*"

The technical procedures of the Mark II got in the way of revealing how rich and subtly varied timbre is moreover, the time it took to explore timbre on these giant synths panicked the neo-serialists into sidestepping it altogether Their computer manoeuvres encouraged the belief — exploded years before by Stockhausen — that the elemental musical building block was the single note, an atom to be strung bead-fashion into a polyphonic weave By contrast, in Conrad's 'subatomic' milieu, the unitary note was expanded in time until it became the whole of the music in the high volume overtone Minimalism and the acoustic effects-world of LaMonte Young, *Metal Machine Music* and Phill Niblock, you walked around inside the note instead of the machine

And meanwhile, on the West Coast, where Cagean pragmatism flourished, a small-scale, DIY approach to computing possibility, electronic synthesis, real-time performance and improvisation had emerged, that would feed straight into the Moogian moment.

Little black boxes

In the late 50s, John Cage had realised that composer-centred automated electronic music was dead in the water concert audiences watching nothing but spooling tapes simply fell asleep In 1969, he and Lejaren Hiller would update Edgard Varèse's Philips Pavilion project (an 'Ambient' installation included in the 1958 Brussels World Fair) with computers, allowing listeners to wander through a flux of ever changing sound This environmental piece, titled *HPSCHD*, used 52 tape machines, 59 power amplifiers, 280 computer-generated tapes and seven amplified real-time harpsichords But events and instrumentation on such a scale were the exception

In 1959, Morton Subotnick, Ramon Sender and others had founded the San Francisco Tape Music Centre (Pauline Oliveros would join them two years later) Here the emphasis was on cheap and handy little 'black boxes' for composing, not all-encompassing, but practical, immediate and involving, and in 1962, Subotnick began discussing the problem with Donald Buchla, who, like Moog, was working on transistor-based voltage control for real-time timbral exploration The Buchla machine that emerged in the mid-60s did not use a keyboard, but a touch-sensitive plate By the time it arrived, Subotnick had moved to New York where he had wangled a record contract with Nonesuch for the epochal *Silver Apples Of The Moon* (1967) It was the first 'classical' work commissioned to appear on vinyl rather than on paper or in the concert hall

Another workshop active in the mid-50s had been Gordon Mumma's and Robert Ashley's Co-operative Studio for Electronic Music in Ann Arbor, Michigan With David Behrman and Alvin Lucier, Mumma and Ashley founded the Live Electronics movement, forming the Sonic Arts Union in 1966 to explore electronic-theatrical and improvisatory works of collective rather than individual responsibility, as well as slow process-oriented textural transformation "In the live performance," Mumma wrote in 1967, "an audience is waiting to be entertained, astonished, amused, abused or whatever, and there is no time for 'reworking' My decisions about electronic procedures, circuitry and configurations are strongly influenced by the requirements of my profession as a music maker This is one reason why I consider that my designing and building of circuits is really 'composing'"

Mumma's Cybersonic Consoles were portable filtration and distortion devices into which 'ordinary' instrumental, vocal and other sounds were fed, to be immediately transformed and broadcast, partly in response to the nature of the performance space Ashley's 1964 *The Wolfman* was a 'blues' song for jazz trio and tapes of electronically modulated high-volume speech Behrman's 1966 *Wave Train* induced controlled feedback via guitar pickups inside a piano to create self-perpetuating but everchanging sound Lucier's 1965 *Music For Solo Performer* amplified brain alphawaves, causing a variety of percussion to sound

In this territory, as Daniel Charles wrote, "Music is no longer 'contained' by the score but is capable of being 'actified' by combinations of electronic circuits which are eminently malleable and whose interactions can give rise to improvisation and random encounters just as well as to regulated organisation The work can no longer be dissociated from the instrument which produces it, and indeed it identifies with the instrument, but without letting this identification weigh on its own future like a sort of destiny In the end music actually *is* electricity, it is the actual circulation of electrons"

Moment of success

Prior to *Switched-On Bach*, modular Moogs had gone to Gordon Mumma, Richard Teitelbaum of Musica Elettronica Viva, Annette Peacock and Sun Ra After the success of *Switched-On Bach* (and the subsequent crazed season of novelty follow-ups, from Gershon Kingsley, Jean-Jacques Perrey and others), there came Keith Emerson's much-copied Moog solo on ELP's "Lucky Man", and the Moog organisation — working with or against the business regime of whoever then owned it — was able to fund its own research and development of the MiniMoog, the first single-unit integrated synthesizer, and later the PolyMoog, the first synth to have a multiple touch-sensitive keyboard

"That was a wildly successful time for selling new instruments," Moog recalls today "We were fond of saying at that time that you could put five pounds of dogshit in a

PHOTO COURTESY OF PETER FORREST/SUSURREAL

paper bag, and if you could get it to make a sound, you could sell it as an instrument."

After he left the Moog company in the late 70s, Moog set up Big Briar, which he still runs. By then, thanks to cheap integrated circuitry and the work of Max Mathews and John Pierce at Bell Labs in New Jersey, digitalisation was a reality. What's more, the MIDI protocols, which allowed numbers of different computer and machine languages to communicate effectively, were just around the corner. Moog had been following both of these developments since the earliest days. Around 1983, he was invited by Ray Kurzweil to work on the Kurzweil line of keyboards, including the 250, an important early sampling keyboard. He left them in 1989, to teach analogue synthesis and music tech design at North Carolina University. In 1995 he returned full time to Big Briar, once more designing and building Theremins, MIDI equipment, and various analogue devices.

This covers a lot of ground, a lot of fashion switchbacks. So have the the kinds of musicians Moog has worked with changed much over the decades? "In the 60s everybody was nuts, out there stretching the boundaries of what you call music," he replies. "I think there's sort of a lull now."

He pauses for thought, and I jump by mistake into the space with my own theory: that while digital equipment provides a lot of control, it also turns everything crystalline and overcontrolled, step-fashion. I mention the apparent nostalgia for 'wildness' in music technology on which some blame the resurgent Theremin, and wonder if everything isn't a bit polite these days.

"Yes," he says, amused, "but I don't think that's a necessary limitation of digital, it's just where we're at. With this MIDI-Theremin we're on the threshold of leaving that: by definition, this enables you to be as wild as you can be with the Theremin itself. I gave a talk in Linz, Austria, to a convention of musicians, sponsored by the local music store. In Austria, classical music culture is much more pervasive than it is in the US, and I found that some musicians wanted the sort of control they were used to: they didn't like the idea of the Theremin, because here they are, they've spent their whole life learning to play something like the cello, and why couldn't I make something like that? And other people saw the Theremin as something to release them from that. At the end of this presentation, a few musicians came up and tried the Theremin, and maybe a small handful found it interesting to make these crazy gestures. Now I can contrast this to what usually happens in the United States. If I address a group of musicians, everybody will come up afterwards and they'll try dumb things, they'll try intelligent things but they'll all be pretty wild. I see a fairly big range of inclinations. At one end of the range are people holding on to gestures of the 19th century, and at the other end, there are people who are really prepared to go beyond that. So how's this different from the 60s? Well, one thing that's different is that then, any electronic sound was new. And now it's not that way at all. People now take electronic sound for granted. From the point of view of the kind of sounds you can make, it's a fairly mature medium."

Bunker mentality

In 1969, while Moog, Buchla, Subotnick and others were blazing the trail for compact, accessible and wild music technology, Pierre Boulez was formulating his own streamlined Gallic version of the god-displacing cityblock-sized music machine. Within a decade, it was thrilling reality: an underground techno-palace hard by Paris's Pompidou Centre, the Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), costing $12 million, internationally staffed and financially independent. IRCAM was expressly designed — with the input of composers, theorists and leading instrument designers — to provide the kind of instrumentality Boulez had called for in his manifesto *Technology And The Composer*: "For some time now, the composer's mental approach, his 'wild' invention, has been free to follow very different paths from those that the medium, the sound material, can offer him. This divergence has caused blockages dangerous enough for invention to lose all its spontaneity . ."

After all, by 1977, when IRCAM came on-line, it was not so easy to claim the American pragmatism of Moog and his contemporaries as the more fruitful art philosophy. After the shock of its first success, the synthesizer had quickly fallen on hard-ish times. Its nine-day-wonder trendiness became a millstone — as Carlos puts it, "The repertoire of sounds that everyone was so crazy about were actually quite boring once the novelty wore off." Sure, modularity gave a non-musician like Eno access — but this was vitiated by the high prices the technology still commanded. The PolyMoog, at one point owned only (it was said, in awed tones) by the likes of Keith Emerson, Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder, was mocked by punks as a rich man's luxury, elephantiasis as antithesis of true rock 'n' roll. To a generation clamouring for demystified access to creative expression, a certain hippy-style anti-technology demagoguery was grafted on to the usual anti-hippy

The dark side of the Moog





Moog at the MIDI-Theremin

rant, and the outmoded pub rock guitar quartet was bought a few months' grace

Perhaps more significantly, rival electronic instrument manufacturers such as ARP had evolved supercheap keyboard sets, which would surface in early garage Electronica The pioneers of this sound — Suicide, The Human League — would establish their punk credentials by courageously facing down the torrents of beer cans hurled at the stage by the New Wave's overnight old guard

After a complex series of mergers and buy-ups, Moog had left his own company, which then vanished into the maw of the leisure industry (it would finally vanish altogether in the mid-80s) "Things change very fast," he says "Technically the instruments we were making in the late 60s were of limited use to people in the early 70s Most of the people who bought the very large modular systems in the late 60s wound up doing little more than you could do on the MiniMoog. Then the thousands of people who bought MiniMoogs wanted something that played chords [laughs] So the evolution of instruments that started in the late 60s was a series of steps where each successive step followed from the last — except that after taking three or four steps, the musicians looked back and saw they'd missed something and wanted to go back."

"What has always seemed to me the most important task of all," Boulez told Dominique Jameux in 1974, "is to try to discover a means of expansion that is not simply a kind of gimmickry [bricolage] — a real expansion of thought, not only logical thinking, in another field — nor merely the astonished discovery of a new toy" But Boulez's own music, such as there is of it, exactly masks the collective labour that goes into timbral construction, where the works of people he had mocked so empathetically, such as West Coast improvisors Subotnick, Sender and Oliveros, did not. It's not that his own *explosante fixe* (as revised for the Deutsche Grammophon label in 1993) is a weak work More to the point, as scored for solo flute, orchestra and taped electronic sound (realised at IRCAM), it belongs in a genre best described as Darmstadt neo-classicism Compared with the textural range of Subotnick's similarly fashioned *Laminations* (1967) — not to mention the outer reaches of Jungle today — it seems trapped in a flat, thin past, an impression only strengthened by its monodimensional deployment of acoustic spaces This is primarily a result of Deutsche Grammophon's classical recording protocols — but then these were the protocols that Carlos had thrown into such hazard with the tape layering of *Switched-On Bach* Add to this the games with collectivity, anti-simultaneity and anti-unitary process-derived random SFX colouring that Cage's computing kids were busy playing in the late 60s — all long since an element in mainstream pop — and it's not so hard to grasp why Boulez has composed next to nothing in 30 years

> **"We used to say you could put five pounds of dogshit in a paper bag, and if you could get it to make a sound, you could sell it as an instrument"**

So, seriousness? Like the Theremin, the Moog *did* touch down in popular consciousness primarily as a gimmick (the astonished discovery of a shiny new toy, as Boulez put it) from *The Plastic Cow Goes Mooooog* to its role in ELP's knife-throwing carnival show stunts Likewise, its happy return in recent years at the centre of the loungecore/space age bachelor pad subculture is a by-product of the wacky *Re/Search* version of Rubbish Theory that anything, no matter how lowly, will one day return in countercultural glory As Boulez once wrote (of the Theremin glissandi in sci-fi movies), they "suggest the 'leap into the future' They play, in fact, a pretty stupid role and one that is much too facile to be accepted as a role at all The point of electronic and electroacoustic devices is that they will expand our instrumental means"

A great man for fearless questions, since 1969 Boulez has been using this gift to disguise his own flight from the practical and social realities of instrument invention, combining a Krel-like dream of a music culture "without physical instrumentality" with a strictly anti-sensual idea of seriousness in order to flee the tone colour realm where most technological breakthroughs must occur, as well as the DIY circuitboard level where composers, players and engineers can discover hard facts they all agree on A genuinely materialist modernist aesthetics is one which embraces the hands-on feel and response of players and their instruments, whereby those shiny new toys are transformed into the voice of the future According to Robert Moog, Wendy Carlos "just had this — still does — absolute genius for getting musical gestures out of electronic stuff She could conceptualise something in great detail, then tell me over the phone or in person how I should do it. And she was always right. What else would very often happen is that I'd build something, a module that performed a certain function, which had a panel and half a dozen knobs, and for most musicians the knobs meant nothing If you described what the module did, nothing came to mind But Wendy, she looked at it, her hands would be going, turning knobs even before she touched the keyboard She *immediately* knew what to do with those, how to make music with them"

A whole bunch of clever stuff

Robert Moog's name has gone round the world people know it, even if they haven't the faintest idea why Yet ask him how different music might have been had he gone into real estate in 1955, and he's almost ludicrously modest. "Probably not too different. A lot of things were happening in the 50s and 60s one highly visible event propelled me into the public eye, but a lot of other people were doing interesting work, and a lot of other manufacturers were going along parallel paths In 1964 Don Buchla built the complete modular system, which was very similar to what I did He did it completely independently Because of his musical orientation he didn't associate a keyboard with it, but he had touchpads that could change sounds, change the pitches, change the wideness, the same sort of things that the systems I built to enable musicians to change All around me people were experimenting with electronic sound, new kinds of music I'm sure if I hadn't come along somebody else would have come along"

I ask what he sees happening next he responds quickly, clearly and concisely. "In the same way that we were on threshold of new sound in the 60s, we may be on the threshold now of new ways of controlling sound This MIDI Theremin is one of a large number of possible control devices And digital systems are fast enough and accurate enough that you can process continuous changes without hearing steps I wouldn't be surprised if the next ten years are for new things to move your hands around on, to control sounds, in the same way that the 60s and early 70s were a time for new sounds"

I try to get him to talk about where he is, what he's achieved, and he's bashful once again, eager to be fair to all "I've been an active part of musical instrument technology for the last 40 years, and I really feel that what I've done has been musically appropriate, as well as technically solid, technically sound I haven't designed a whole bunch of *clever* stuff I think that a lot of my competitors have done *clever* things — maybe I shouldn't mention names, but there have been a lot of things that have looked good for a short time, and then died out" Then, in the dying moments of the interview, he at last gives up on level-field fairmindedness and laughs. "And I think the reason they've died out is that the musical promise they seemed to exhibit turned out not to be there Whereas what I've done has endured" □ *Mark Sinker's study of music and technology,* The Electric Storm, *will be published by Quartet sometime before 2525*

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LTJ Bukem

Tested by Peter Shapiro

Born [illegible], 1968, known as Danny Williamson was raised in Watford on a diet of classical piano, Two-Tone ska, Chick Corea and *Hawaii Five-O* (whose catch phrase, "Book 'em Danno", is the genesis of his nom de disque). After DJing in local sound systems and graduating to large-scale raves, Bukem released his debut single, "Logical Progression", on Vinyl Mania in 1991. Soon afterwards "Demon's Theme" appeared on his own label, Good Looking, and permanently altered the face of breakbeat music with its mixture of propulsive rhythm and mellow vibes. His 1993 single "Music" introduced the world of drum 'n' bass to the "Amen" break which has since been used on literally hundreds of records. As Good Looking continued to release aquatint drum 'n' bass by Aquarius (aka Photek), PFM and Peshay, Bukem started the now legendary Jungle club Speed with Fabio at the Mars Bar in London. His 1996 compilation, *Logical Progression*, defined his vision of drum 'n' bass and was such a commercial success that Good Looking are about to release a third volume. The Jukebox took place in the offices of Good Looking in Hertfordshire.



LEROY HUTSON
"Love That Feeling" from *The Best Of Leroy Hutson* (DeepBeats)

[Immediately] All right, now we're talking. You might as well play the next track, man. This is Hutson. *Feel The Spirit* album.

You namecheck him a lot.

Yeah, Hutson, Lonnie Liston Smith, all these guys are just way ahead of their time, the melodies, the harmonies, the way that the vocals are like another musical instrument. The arrangements are not too dissimilar from how we'd arrange a tune now. I find that that bassline all the way through there, that kind of monotony, that's infectious, that makes you want to stay there, that makes you go, 'I could listen to this track for 20 minutes'. It's still the same loop.

You've said that the 70s are your favourite period of music. What is it about the 70s that appeals?

That very thing. It was the birth of the drum break. I don't know, it must have been the way they were recording or

what they were recording on or their studio set-up I don't know whether it was luck or if they just loved that sound, it just did something to me that made me think, 'Wow, this is music' It changed my way of thinking about so many things They must have had a different attitude as well, a whole different life structure to what they were feeling and thinking. The kind of love that's put into this kind of thing, I don't know, I find it so hard to talk about this kind of thing, but I feel it. Tell me an artist that has sampled a break from the 80s, please They all come from that, but people put it down so much

AZYMUTH

"Manha" from *London Jazz Classics Volume 3* (Soul Jazz)

I know this, but I don't know the name of it. Is this a new thing?

No, it's old.

I know this Who's this?

It's Brazilian.

Sad, as well Tune's got a bad groove on it.

It's Azymuth.

Oh! It's not from *Jazz Carnival* or something is it?

It's from the same period, it's off this compilation.

[He looks at the album cover] I've got this That's why I knew it.

It's the kind of thing that [DJ] Gilles Peterson used to play at Dingwalls [in Camden, North London] in the 80s.

Oh, yeah, typical Gilles isn't it? It's funny actually, I can't get into all the Azymuth stuff, but so many pieces are unbelievable A bit like Deodato in that way as well — a couple of his tracks are unreal I remember going out raving on Saturday nights to Westwood or somebody and then going out to Camden on Sunday mornings in the same clothes and all that to Dingwalls and it was just the music and the whole vibe — all those places, Rap Attack and Mastermind I'd love to get all those guys into a room and go, 'C'mon man, why did you pick out that selection to play out every weekend back in the mid-80s? What did it do to you?' I'd love to know because these are the guys who brought me to where I am today Simple as that.

It's a strange combination, going to both jazz dances and raves.

It is, yeah [laughs] It's a hard connection as well Here's a guy who likes all this sort of stuff and then goes out and plays The Prodigy I think the reason for that is that it gave me the same energy I'd go out and be sitting there with a bag of weed in the mid-80s, listening to a tune and think, 'Fuckin' hell' There'd be ten of us going, 'Listen to this Check out that bass' That happened to me when I first went raving in 87, 88 When you heard "Washing Machine" by Mr Fingers at 20K, you're like, 'Oh my god, what's this all about?'

The two scenes were very antagonistic to each other. It was like serious music versus kids just going out and getting off their heads.

Oh yeah, totally That just goes to show you that it doesn't matter how music's made, it's the effect that it has on you I think that's so wrong of jazz guys to slate electronic guys and sampler guys when, if you stop and think for a minute, we can get together here and create something even newer and fresher again You can't have those negative kind of vibes, it's just non-progressive I feel strongly about that.



PHAROAH SANDERS

"Astral Traveling" from *Thembi* (Impulse!)

[Immediately] Pharoah Sanders This is what Photek sampled to make "Rings Around Saturn" That geezer, man, Rupert, he just blows my mind If Rupert just made tunes like "Rings Around Saturn", my set would just be tunes by Rupert 'Photek' Parkes

Do you know who's playing keyboards?

Lonnie [Liston Smith] You can hear it [he sings the keyboard part] straight away

What is it about the Fender Rhodes that you respond to so much?

For me, the Fender Rhodes is the most sexy, the horniest — just everything you can imagine happens to me when I hear a Rhodes played how it should be played All you got to do is pick up 20 Lonnie albums and lock yourself in a room and you'll know why I love the Rhodes Mix a Rhodes with a string section and a trumpet and a sax and you've just got music for life Life isn't long enough for you to get bored or depressed or anti that kind of music, you never wear it out.

I wish these guys still made what they made then now Maybe the whole 80s major [label] deal changed their views on making music. I've talked to Lonnie and I was like, 'Wow, this is not too dissimilar from drum 'n' bass' You start off with a sound and now somebody's trying to take that sound off of you and put it into something different because they've now got to market it. The [musicians] that signed [major] deals, fair play to some of them because they stuck to their thing and said, 'I don't care how much money you're giving me, I'm making what I want to make' And I say big up to those guys Me, I ain't got no problem because I'm independent. If you don't like it, you don't like it, but I'll sleep a happy man and I'll die an ecstatic man because whether one person or 70,000 people bought [the Good Looking compilation] *Earth*, I'll be in my rocking chair when I'm 90 years old and I'll say, 'This is my music', and for me that's what it's all about.

But the Rhodes is like phheew I'm collecting the fuckers now [laughs] I've just built a studio in my house and I'm going to crowd out the studio with any kind of Fender Rhodes I can get my hands on I'll just sit there playing them add some wah, some tremolo and vibrato and you've just got a soundscape I can see so much as well You sit there and play certain progressions on the Rhodes and you can see things

Do you see yourself as an extension of that symphonic soul thing?

I think music from decade to decade is an extension of the last decade It's all coming from somewhere and going around and around There are 12 notes on the keyboard and that's the musical scale No matter how many different ways you play it or what instrument you play it on, you're not going to get any more notes There are no more notes What we're doing is reviving all that's come before and putting it into our spectrum, if you like That's all we're doing and what we will be doing until the end of time I really think this lot hit upon the dawn of where it all really came from

WAX DOCTOR

"Kid Caprice (Remix)" from *Collected Works* (R&S)

[Immediately] Wax Doctor remix? Til the day I die, this will remind me of Fabio It reminds me of the many good times I had playing out with that geezer and, hopefully, many good times to come as well That's a live bass

Is this the first time this break was used?

Wax used it first. I think I used it second on "Horizons" I got the break from a James Brown EP called "Feelin' Good" Do you remember that? It starts with a geezer going, *"I feel at one with the world"*, or something, then it breaks into this I don't know where Wax got this, though Maybe one of those sample CDs because it did crop up on Zero G or Ecstatic Goldmine round about 91 or 92 [After the flute comes in] That's from A Guy Called Gerald

What is it about a break that makes you want use it?

It's just how a break makes me feel I've always loved cymbally-style 70s breaks I used to play drums, so I used to play with that kind of feel It's also the sound of the break where it was recorded can often be the key The mood of the break puts me somewhere Put it through the computer, chop it and just sit there for an hour, 'Mmm, yeah, yeah' That's me, you know what I mean? [Laughs]

DOUBLE DEE & STEINSKI

"Lesson One: The Payoff Mix" from *No Rights Given Or Implied: The Original Samplers* (Bond Street)

Bloody hell What's this 87, 88?

I think it was 85.

This used to get played out at raves in the late 80s That bassline was sampled a lot [Bukem sings the bassline] This was the first time that bassline was used?

Yes, but it's a remix.

Oh right, it's a remix of "Play That Beat Mr DJ" Soulsonic Force?

It was GLOBE & Whiz Kid from Soulsonic Force. It's the Double Dee & Steinski remix.

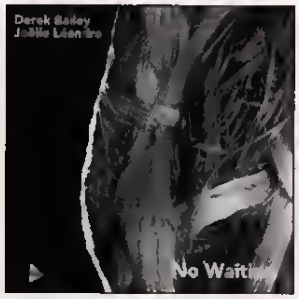
Oh right, yeah This reminds me of Rap Attack where the DJ would be playing something and then mix in Loose Ends and then Run DMC's "Peter Piper" I was playing some of this stuff last week actually I had done my drum 'n' bass bit and then went into the back room and played whatever I just sat in front of the records and went, 'I remember that, I'll have that, oh yes', and just put it together as a set.

You've talked about Kool Herc in the past, is this kind of cut-up mixing important to you?

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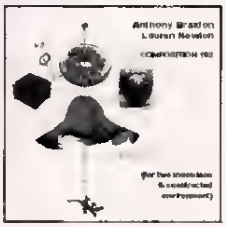
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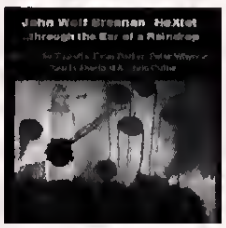
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CD LR 255 **EVAN PARKER WITH NOEL AKCHOTE, LAWRENCE CASSERLEY AND JOEL RYAN;** ***LIVE AT "LES INSTANTS CHAVIRES"***

Read this: *"History will bear this out. Even Perker is the most important sexophone innovator since the lata '60s"* (Down Beat, April 1998). We'd known it all along, hadn't we, yet it's nice to get a confirmation from the most backward-looking jazz magazine in USA. This CD might be called "another electronic project of Evan Parker". It is a result of three days of performances in Paris, December 1997. Notes by Evan Parker, total time 77'30

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Guys like Kool Herc are the ones that put that kind of stuff at the forefront. Herc came to my house after he played Logical [Progession, Bukem's club night] and he was bitter 'Man, I brought all these grooves out and these damn fools ' I felt a bit for him. Without him and Grandmaster Flash where would be? Would we have HipHop at all? This reminds me of Herc around my house talking absolute nonsense. He came around with four Adidas bags full of tunes. He asked me for a record box! I gave him my record box. 'Here you go man. You need a record box. Take it' [Laughs] He just pulled all these records out of these bags and I was just like, 'I want that. I want that'. Amazing.

When you DJ do you try to cut things up?

I never got into that side of HipHop DJing. I did it for a laugh at home. I tended to go more for the mix side of things which now becomes more apparent. Guys like DJ Hype do that. I respect to the max their talents. Cutting up at 165 [bpms] is madness, you know what I mean?

THE WINSTONS

"Amen Brother" from *Ultimate Breaks And Beats Volume One* (Streetbeat)

[Immediately] Oh, man. [He sings along with the keyboards. To Good Looking's press officer] Hey Lee, do you know what this tune is? This is the almightiest of almighty breaks. You'll never believe what break comes from this tune. Check it out, listen. [After the drum break] The way it slows down as well, that's cookin'. Them boys are off it whoever they are. They need to get paid. Well, what is there to say about this? This is the almighty. In House you got the kick drum, in drum 'n' bass you got "Amen". I know these days, guys are sampling kicks and snares and giving it that [he imitates a Techstep drum pattern] kind of feel, but that's only come about recently. This has been monumental for like ten years in the drum 'n' bass scene. It's just unbelievable.

How did you come across it?

I actually heard that tune out back in the mid-80s. Then, in the late 80s I was just getting familiar with the sampler and hearing the sampler used for the first time. I always thought that if I could ever afford to buy a sampler — I thought there was no way I could do it, of course — but if I could, I would have that break on a sampler. Things like Mantronix's "King Of The Beats" just caned that beat. I used to be totally hooked on that, they used to call me Danny Amen. For the best part of 1993, I was just the Amen warrior, seriously. Flying beats everywhere. Any which way you could chop up "Amen" and have it come out of the sampler on dubplate, I wanted it. It's still good. I know people say, 'We've gone past "Amen" now', but you can't forget where you came from and "Amen" is a break.

It's a strange combination, especially with the bpms cranked up, and the lush, mellow strings.

It's one of the very few breaks that you can speed up to 160 [bpm] and it still sounds awesome. Most breaks you have to fatten up, stretch, chop, do all sorts of things so that it sounds fat at 165, but you can just speed that up and it sounds brilliant. Whatever you put "Amen" with, it seems to fill up every frequency. When you're in a club it's such a full sound.



OPTICAL/ TRACE

"Spectre" 12" (Prototype)

Who's this? Optical?

It's Optical with someone else.

Are you going to put that in the magazine, that I guessed it was Optical straight away? That will shock everyone.

It's Optical with Trace.

When I hear anything by Optical, I think 'wicked drums' I'd love to do a track with Optical. Really. I'd love to put my music over his beats. I think the breaks on a lot of those tunes are excellent. I'm not too into the sounds, but I totally understand what they're doing, totally respect what it's about. Some of the drums are really intricate and laid down really beautifully. Like Photek, I'm not particularly into everything that Rupert does now, but every track I can listen to and go, 'Yep, that's the Rupert I know'. I have respect for that rhythm.

Do you think that it's got maybe too intricate, with people spending weeks on end in front of the computer getting everything just so?

Yes, but fair play. You got something there called the sampler, man. It's your orchestra. If you want to make your orchestra play a tune that way, then you can do it. If you got the talent to manipulate and make your sampler do that, then the more the better. I've got nothing negative to say about the way a man may manipulate his sampler because not everyone can do that.

UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE

"Jupiter Jazz" from *Deepest Shade Of Techno* (SSR/Crammed)

What's this? Don't tell me. Let me try to get it. I'm so terrible as well. Kick drum. [Sings along with the keyboard line] Bad tune as well. This is like 92 or 93. I used to play this out as well. I can even see the cover and see the disc spinning around. What is it? It's from Detroit.

That's right. Underground Resistance.

This reminds me of 1993 when this was all that I wanted to play out. The tempos were so close between the House and the breakbeats, that was like my orgasm. I used to go out and buy House tracks, Techno tracks, drum 'n' bass tracks and go, 'Right, let's sit down and fuck around with them'. I'd just mix everything with everything. This is a tune that made me think I could play this forever.

That was always my search — for a set that I could play out forever. That was always my thing. Bad tune, man, such a bad tune. Why don't people make tunes like this anymore?

There's a real depth and warmth to the sound.

It's so meaningful. It's hard to talk about. It's hard to delve into it and go, 'Can't you see? Can't you see what's going on?' I just know there's some big connection between all of this. I don't know if it's got to do with my piano teacher, the way he showed me some chords that I hadn't thought of, the warmth inside me, that whole 7Ds thing, the group of friends that were around me, there were like 3D or 4D of us who liked the same thing. That's kind of weird, you know what I mean? We'd all be going out in carloads to jazz things, breakbeat, soul things, early raves. Bad tune, bad, bad, bad tune.

SONZ OF A LOOP DA LOOP ERA

"Far Out" from *Here Come The Drums: HipHop Drum 'N' Bass* (Caipirinha)

That's the "Funky Nassau" break. It suddenly stops and goes [he imitates the drum break] — mad break which not a lot of people know. I know this so well, what's [the original] label? Suburban Base. Who made the tune?

Danny Breaks.

He's making Speed Garage now isn't he? What is this, 94?

1992.

Is it? This is a great tune as well. This reminds me of Universe, Dreamscape, Raindance, all those [early UK raves], just rolling around big fields. It was exciting. I can't say that I'm a big fan of the Happy Hardcore thing. It hasn't moved on as far as it could have done, maybe. Easy to say. People say that about my music, but I'll say, 'Hang on a minute, it has moved on in leaps and bounds.' It's a personal thing.

I was just so glad to be a part of what was going on. I was happy that I was making people happy listening to tunes that I was into. There's never been a tune that I've played that I haven't been into, never. At the same time, I was at home with a Korg keyboard making "Demon's Theme" [using] Malcolm McLaren vocals. I can't explain that, it just seemed like what I should be making. I sat down, got a few breaks together, thought, 'Wicked'. Got a chord, I thought, 'Yeah, it's cool'. This goes there, that goes there. It's quite symphonic and I'm into this. Put some more sounds with it and that was it. A lot of people go, 'Why did you put that with that?' I don't know, but it sounds all right, doesn't it? It does sound weird, though. I listen to my sets from 91 or 92 and I'll always be playing a different set to what "Atlantis" or "Music" were doing. By 1994 I was happy with everything I was playing out in my set. It's so interesting, seeing that progression.

In those times, you couldn't find a whole tune of what you wanted to play out, I couldn't anyway. "Demon's Theme" was that tune. "Demon's Theme" was a whole tune of what I'd have liked to play 12 of in an hour set, but that wasn't possible. So, all I've got to do is put it out, do it myself, start my own label, do my own thing. Hopefully, one day I'll have enough on my own label to play an entire set. That's what I was thinking. Little did I know that by 93 there'd only be three tunes, but by then I think it brought out things in other people and made them want to make that kind of thing. Now, there's loads of it and I'm just in my element. □

PHOTO OF OPTICAL: AMY & TANVEER

wild

So you thought **Royal Trux** were a pair of Wise up. From their remote Virginia ranch, and the stock market. Words: Louise Gray.

Much has been written on the spectacle of rock 'n' roll, less on its spectacular couples Sid 'n' Nancy, Kurt 'n' Courtney, maybe (once) Neil 'n' Jennifer The first pairing resurrects carney voyeurism (buy your ticket, watch the show), the second a more complex form of freakshow in which it's just possible — especially if smack is involved — that the protagonists exist on some finite fuse That this may be the(ir) last time — and isn't that sexy?

Undoubtably, there have been some who watched the progress of Royal Trux through the frisson haze added by such studied ghoulishness Formed in Chicago in 1987 by vocalist Jennifer Herrema and, from the ruins of Pussy Galore, guitarist Neil Hagerty, Royal Trux's early output exuded the very finity that makes people listen It was lo-fi madness, drawing such approving appellations as "primitive futuristic an avant garde mess-thetic" The haphazard, crazed feedback and dissonances of their first self-titled album (1988, Royal Records) and its successor, *Twin Infinitives* (Drag City), provoked comparisons with Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica* and early Zappa, although it's difficult to talk about the records' musical intention in quite the same way They contained more references to disposable culture and B movie Sci-fi than anything in The Ramones or Cramps combined, others suggested the music was the product of 'a bad trip to the pharmacy' The truth is probably somewhere in between A long time ago

Herrema, speaking in London from behind a sight-impairing fringe, is impatient on this point "I want to demystify the whole persona thing that's built up around us, that we're this sleaze culture, this white trash junkie band It's been years since we were strung out That's just one little tiny piece of what makes us what we are It's not the whole picture, but then" — a concession — "it's easy to write about."

In one sense, there is no whole picture of Royal Trux, just a series of oscillations between positions, of spaces between points. On a practical level, for the purposes of this interview, the whole picture of Trux is kept in abeyance Herrema speaks in London, Hagerty, who is afraid of flying and will travel to Europe for the duo's forthcoming tour by ocean liner, communicates from their Virginia ranch via fax But this constant motion between points, real and abstract, is a wilful state of affairs, a point which their latest (and seventh) album presses home with more subtlety than its driving rock momentum often suggests *Accelerator* revels in its rough, garage sound, it's a creation that's utterly devoid of any concession to neatness The boundaries to the songs are ragged, so too the sly-eyed vocals, the feral harmonies Apart from the constancy afforded by its two lead characters, the musicians are a pick-up group At times, *Accelerator* is as opaque as The Residents, as backwoods as Palace Brothers (it's probably no coincidence that Will Oldham's younger brother Paul is a Trux techie), as raucous as The Stooges Liberating stuff It's as close to anti-product as any marketed record can be Small wonder that Neil Hagerty and Jennifer Herrema live in the wilds of Virginia, surrounded by survivalists, where the neighbours can't hear them There they record their group, feed dog food to the foxes, and play the stock market with the residue of the $1 3 million pay-off Virgin Records gave them after their 1997 *Sweet Sixteen* album The Royal couple do surprisingly well, investing in casino and entertainment conglomerates such as Harrah's They also have a gun



Dangerous to the point of sanity, Trux's manifesto lies in their interpretation/application of Ornette Coleman's theory of harmolodics Defined by Trux in a short essay accompanying last year's double CD collection, *Singles, Live, Unreleased*, as "the possibility of relationships", harmolodics provides a potentially sophisticated device to both create situations and analyse the results "Possibilities of relationships are not confined or defined by any one period in time or genre or work aesthetic," says Herrema "For example, the last musicians we picked up were working on a casino gambling boat playing cover tunes They were just hacks One of them [drummer Ken Nasta] was on



things

strung-out rock 'n' roll junkies?
avant garage's First Couple are astutely playing
Photos of Jennifer Herrema: Stefan De



Sweet Sixteen and [keyboard player] Timothy MacClain was some guy we just found living down south and playing Bob Marley at beach clubs That was it We had nothing really in common with them other than the fact we all liked music and that in itself was part of the variety we were looking for in the arrangements we made The type of people we surround ourselves with is not to be limited in any way"

Hagerty adds via fax "Harmolodics is my only social and moral framework Everything I do is in a relationship with a billion fragmented lines through time Understanding those relationships and my next line is the exertion that leaves its record in music Rather than trying to control the things I understand, I would like to leave them free to develop as they will I know what concrete ideas are attached to *Accelerator*, but they don't involve false need or seduction in measured doses It sure isn't about imposing my ego on anyone We have our wits with which to do that."

Trux are themselves slightly vague as to when harmolodics was first employed as a tool It's possible that it may represent a retrospective slant on their music, in as much as the theory followed the event In any case, they seem to strive towards situations which, in providing friction, offer a new and unpredictable dynamic "This unknown quantity is part of our decisions," agrees Herrema "When we decided to start work on *Accelerotor*, we knew that we wanted to make a record under 40 minutes, that we wanted to keep the bandwidth, the signal, within this shape [she uses her hands to frame a horizontal space], whereas with *Sweet Sixteen* the highs were up here and the lows down there We wanted to compress and condense everything to a narrow bandwidth We had this idea that the music would be more subliminal It could, like a lot of TV and radio music, run right by you and yet leave a trace People are telling me that they'll listen to the record over and over and that they'll maybe hum one of the tunes, which is exactly what we set out to do"

While Herrema concedes that *Accelerator*'s sonic parameters cannot be replicated during live shows, it's significant that the Trux duo have decided to approach music from this new direction If it weren't so patently untrue, cynics might suggest that it was a push towards a greater commercial viability or, as the first album to follow *Sweet Sixteen*, a reaction against their Virgin experience, an unhappy three-album deal which yielded a *Sticky Finger*-ed *Thank You* (1995), *Sweet Sixteen* (the title came from an Iggy Pop song on *Lust For Life*) and a large cheque "They'd wanted us to use a producer," remembers Herrema "We hadn't wanted to use any producer They'd wanted us to use some studio, one they probably owned, we'd built a 24-track studio at home They weren't happy we were going to record at home We made the records We didn't hear from them for a while and then we spoke It started with them saying, 'As true Royal Trux fans, we think this is a great record and we expected you to go further', and it finally dwindled down to, 'This is just no good, it's got way too many notes, it's too confusing, children need something to rollerskate to' That's exactly what they said Too many notes Children need something to rollerskate to Yeah"

All of which raises the question of the destination of their music It's not for males, it's not for females ("Riot Grrrl was complete bullshit, it was incredibly regressive," Herrema says, appalled that the segregation it suggested was considered even briefly seriously) Nor is it for kids, by which she means anyone under sweet 16 "I don't like children When I was a kid, children were stupid and they generally moved around in packs They had no notion of decentralisation" She adds, later, "Teenagers do buy our records, tons of 'em, but I think it's because we don't condescend to them" Hagerty, already on record declaring Royal Trux as a group for middle America rather than New York intellectuals, says, "If the middle Americans could let go of their efforts to sustain certain lines of bullshit, things could get interesting We find that you don't need to support a consumer economy with a lot of bogus quid pro quo or nationalism Pleasure could find its own level without the need for revolution or invasion from the outsiders By the same token, our bread and butter customers are 'New York City reactionary intellectuals' from Orlando to Sacramento, and the less we try to do things for that world, the more records we will sell to them"

Nibbling the hand that feeds them? An old tactic, yet one that can have some efficacy The paradox is that Trux music — with all its haphazard qualities, its manifest inadequacies, its often precarious and inchoate references — is far from inarticulate If *Accelerator* is marginally less confrontational than its predecessors, it's because it seeks to destabilise But what? 'Decentralisation' is a key word in their conversation and it goes hand in hand with a scepticism levelled at all organisations An innate distrust of government is an essential characteristic of US culture, Herrema suggests, and it's no coincidence that she grew up in Washington DC, while Hagerty was the scion of an army family One might mention here their interest in science fiction, a genre defined by its paranoid tendencies — indeed, Hagerty has recently published his first foray into the area A short and baffling novel, *Victory Chimp*, stars a psychic, space-hopping monkey as its protagonist who seeks to survive against various incomprehensible odds In as much as Royal Trux are a product, a regurgitation, of US culture, they are also peculiarly outside the world Herrema relates a revealing anecdote from her days as a poster girl for Calvin Klein's CK One, an advertising campaign over-reaching in its global intentions Being splattered on billboards and buses the world over didn't exactly change her life "Good money, though Really good I don't live near any city, so I didn't see any of the campaign After it had been up a really long time, we went up to New York to do press and I saw a whole postered area of me, but really old, all tattered, ready for someone to go over it."



It is an extraordinary story Herrema was a face for one of the biggest poster campaigns in the world, she and Hagerty subscribe to *The Wall Street Journal*, compile a financial database and play the markets They live in the wilds and write songs about US culture and a consumerism which makes little definition between buying drugs and washing machines "Well, exactly," Herrema says Isn't that the whole picture? □ Accelerator *is out now on Domino (through Vital) Neil Hogerty's novel* Victory Chimp *is published by Drog City Books Royal Trux tour the UK this month see Soundings for details*

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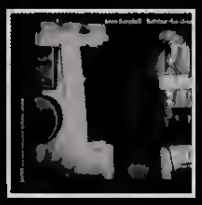
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charts

Playlists from the outer limits of planet sound

Wired For Sound 15

Harry Partch Harry Partch Collection (CRI)
Claude Schryer Autour (empreintes DIGITALes)
Steve Peters Emanations (OD Discs)
Satoko Fujii Orchestra South Wind (Leo Lab)
John Coltrane Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings (Impulse!)
Alan Lomax (producer) Southern Journey Series (Rounder)
Matthew Shipp with Joe Morris Thesis (hatOLOGY)
Ronnie Lane Kuschty Rye (New Millennium)
June Tabor Aleyne (Green Linnett)
Bill Evans Complete Bill Evans On Verve (Verve)
The Move Movements (WestSide)
Or Oidg Serotonality (Hannibal)
Ulf Langheinrich Degrees Of Amnesia (Asphodel/Sombient)
Henri Dutilleux Tout Un Monde Lointain (Chandos)
William Parker & The Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra Sunrise In The Tone World (AUM Fidelity)

Compiled by Chris Meloche, Wired For Sound, *CHRW 94.7 FM (London, Ontario, Canada), Mondays 10pm, or via Internet:* www.chrw.fm.net

WNUR 15

Vandermark 5 Live At The Empty Bottle (Savage Sound Syndicate)
Mengelberg/Gustafsson/Prins Live In Holland 97 (X-OR)
Edward Wilkerson Jr The Path (Sound Aspects)
Steve Lacy Associates (Robi Droli)
Duke Ellington & Johnny Hodges Play The Blues Back To Back (Verve)
Kaffe Matthews cdAnn (Annette Works)
Sten Sandell Behind The Chords (LJ Records)
Jim Hall Live At The Village Vanguard (Telarc)
Fred Van Hove PjP (WIMprovier)
Music Revelation Ensemble Cross Fire (DIW)
Horace Silver Quintet Further Explorations (Blue Note)
Andrew Cyrille Trio Good To Go (Soul Note)
Hamiet Bluiett Ballads & Blues (Soul Note)
Abrams/Dewar/Barry Calamities Break (Savage Sound Syndicate)
Myra Melford & Han Bennink Eleven Ghosts (hatOLOGY)

Compiled by Jason Karaian, Chicago's Sound Experiment, *89.3 WNUR FM, weekdays 5am-12:30pm. Website:* www.wnur.org/jazz/wnur.html

The Office Ambience

Sonic Youth A Thousand Leaves (Geffen)
John Coltrane Living Space (Impulse!)
Various Electro Boogie Vol 2 (Studio K7)
Tone Rec Pholcus (Sub Rosa)
Various Here Come The Drums. HipHop Drum 'N' Bass (Caipirinha)
The Djembe Of Bobo Fa Kiyen Yiriwa (Playasound)
Milford Graves Grand Unification (Tzadik)
Jurassic 5 Jurassic 5 EP (Rumble/Pickininny)
Pluramon Render Bandits (Mille Plateaux)
Barry Adamson As Above So Below (Mute)
Jimmy Bosch Soneando Trombon (RykoLatino)
Azusa Plane America Is Dreaming Of Universal String Theory (Colorful Clouds For Acoustics)
Substance Session Elements (Chain Reaction)
John Tchicai/Yusef Komunyakaa Love Notes From The Madhouse (8th Harmonic Breakdown)
Taku Sugimoto Opposite (hatNOIR)

Compiled by The Wire *Sound System*

Radio Politika 15

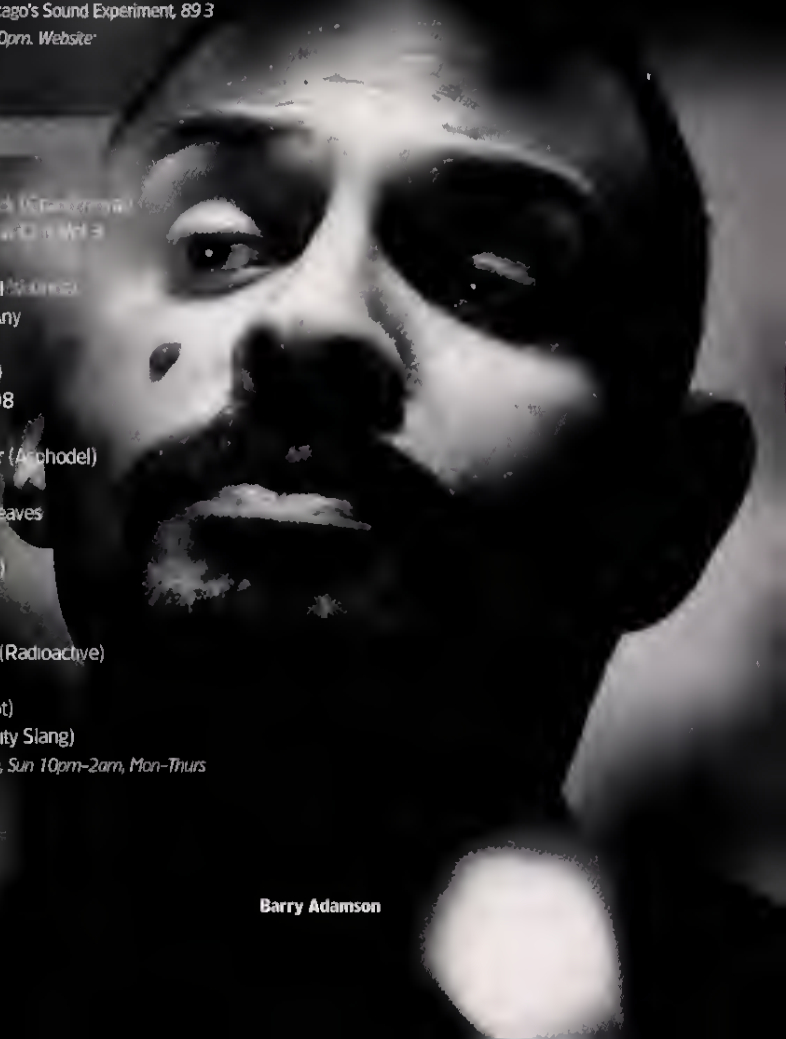
Suicide Suicide (Red Star/Blast First)
Labradford Mi Media Naranja (Blast First)
Royal Trux Accelerator (Domino)
Goldie Saturnz Return (ffrr)
Andreas Dorau Die Menschen Sind Kalt (from Compact Disc Volume Three compilation) (Ladomat 2DDD)
Salaryman Salaryman (City Slang)
Speedy J Patterns (remix) (from NovaMute Kompilation) (NovaMute)
Pram The North Pole Radio Station (Domino)
Gastr Del Sol Camofleur (Domino)
Gastr Del Sol Crookt, Crackt, Or Fly (Drag City)
Pulp This Is Hardcore (Island)
Tortoise TNT (City Slang)
Rope Rope Hotel (Geist)
Sonic Youth/Jim O'Rourke SYR3 EP (Sonic Youth Recordings/Smells Like Records)
William Hooker/Lee Ranaldo/Zeena Parkins The Gift Of Tongues (Knitting Factory)

Compiled by Nikola Tamindzic, Radio Politika, Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Website: www.classroom.opennet.org/~merser

Xfm 15

Buffalo Daughter [illegible]
Various Funkungfusion [illegible] (Ninja Tune)
Juicy Eureka Track 29 (Gol[illegible]
Mice Parade A Dance By Any Other Name (Fat Cat)
Skyray Tranquiliser (Ochre)
Glen Brown Lambsbread 98 The Remixes (Bonafide)
Mixmaster Mike Atmosfear (Asphodel)
Rope Rope Hotel (Geist)
Sonic Youth A Thousand Leaves (Geffen)
Appliance Outer (Earworm)
Dirty Three Deep Waters (Xfm session track)
Snow Pony St Lucy's Gate (Radioactive)
Pilgrim DIE (Flo)
Blowpipe Pendulum (Robot)
Calexico The Black Light (City Slang)

Compiled by John Kennedy, Xfm, Sun 10pm-2am, Mon-Thurs 11pm-3am



Barry Adamson

sound check

On their marks: May's selected albums and 12"s



Czech points: Iva Bittová reviewed page 52

Beñat Achiary/Michel Doneda/Kazue Sawaï

Temps Couche

VICTO CDOSS CD

Beñat Achiary

Basque Music Of Today

AUVIDIS SILEX Y 225D69 2XCD

Meetings between the avant garde and the ancient have produced some very evocative and exotic music. Think of John Cage's works for percussion ensembles such as *First Construction In Metal* (1939) and *Second Construction* (1940), or Harry Partch's *And On The Seventh Day Petals Fell In Petaluma* (1966); works that still sound utterly modern, yet are imbued with the timbres and ceremonial/mystical ambience of Balinese, Chinese and Japanese traditional musics.

Contemporary improvisors have also been making these kinds of connections. In France, Nancy's Improv scene has developed a distinctive style influenced by numerous world folk musics. Michel Doneda, one of its principal members, and one of the most original saxophonists in Improv, has been called a "folklorist of the future", an indication of how both the ancient and modern coalesce in his playing. On *Temps Couché* he is joined by fellow Nancy scene member, vocalist Beñat Achiary (check out their wonderful duo CD, *Ce N'est Pourtant*, on L'empreinte Digitale), and Japanese koto player Kazue Sawai. Together they create a startling and unsettling music where barbarous outbursts can unexpectedly subside into passages of bucolic calm. When the troubled, plaintive tone of Doneda's atonal soprano is pitched against the low thrum of Sawai's thickly textured pizzicato, something like a bleak, medieval soundworld emerges. Achiary's dramatic voice inhabits these shifting landscapes, bellicose and majestic as a Pagan deity, light and lyrical, his enchanting falsetto weaves a peculiar magic. In seeking new sonic territories these highly sensitive improvisors have summoned up the spirit of an imaginary bygone age, its rituals and its myths.

Born in the French part of Spain's Basque region, Beñat Achiary is also one of its leading folk singers. Unfortunately, the sleevenotes to *Basque Music Of Today* don't include information about this tradition, though they do provide English translations to the lyrics. Achiary's use of instruments such as synthesizer and electric guitar indicate that he is keeping this a *living* tradition, where elements of jazz and rock can have their say. However, the song themes are principally the perennials — love and death — which often call for an ebullient vocal style, and on especially demonstrative pieces like "Tio Vivo", "Indien", "Lili Purprea", "Ur Ferdez", and the rock driven "Bazko", Achiary narrows the gap between song and his more radical Improv vocalising. Doneda and another Nancy scene improvisor, Dominique Regef (hurdy-gurdy, rebec, Isra), are among the instrumental performers.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

An A-Z of reviews:

Beñat Achiary/Michel Doneda/Kazue Sawaï Aube **Francois Bayle** Iva Bittovà **Boards Of Canada** Borbetomagus **Caravan** *Classic Plant* ***Closed On Account Of Rabies*** Collective 4tet **Cuncordu Oe Orosei** The Electric Eels **Luc Ferrari** Fretless AZM **Lisa Gerrard & Pieter Bourke** Thomas Heberer **Hugh Hopper & Kramer** Ice ***Invisible Soundtracks: Macro 2*** Pandelis Karayorgis & Mat Maneri **Kenny Process Team** Khaled **Ulf Langheinrich** Lhasa Cement Plant **Alvin Lucier/Björn Nilsson/Zoltán Jeney** Joe Maneri **Mat Maneri Quintet** MAZK **Brian McMahon** Merzbow **Oonald Miller & Michael J Schumacher** Jeff Mills **Money Mark** Natural Language **No Noise Reduction** Evan Parker/John Russell/John Edwards/Mark Sanders **Bernard Parmegiani** Arvo Pärt **Phuture303** Plastikman **Pulp** The Raincoats **Michel Redolfi** Royal Trux **Howard Skempton** Soft Machine **Sonic Youth** Sotto In Su ***Sounds From The Electronic Lounge*** Rachid Taha **Tarwater** Tenore De Orosei **Daniel Terruggi** *Those Were Different Times* **Rafael Toral** Ui **Village Of Savoonga** ***plus avant rock, classical, critical beats, electronico and jazz reissues in brief***



Ice
Bad Blood
MORPHEUS MORPH001CD

A fantastic return for Ice. Kevin Martin and Co have obviously spent the last four years trawling through the charnel houses of rap and TripHop. The newly added skills of Scott Harding's drum loops (engineer for Wu Tang Clan and The Gravediggaz) and scratching from DJ Vadim has helped to lift Martin's usual penchant for cancerous zombie masses from the slough of despond into true-boned apocalyptic rap.

Each track stalks its way in hobnail boots through parallel worlds of urban paranoia and demonic hellscapes where dry crunching beats alternate with pounding dreadnought bass. There are seven rappers to choose from here if you include the rasping utterances of Blixa Bargeld, who backs Toastie Taylor on "The Snakepit", a pair of renegade demon thugs from an Alan Moore dystopia. EL-P and A-Cyde duet on "Trapped In Three Dimensions" — cartoon pornography spliced with Marvel hero energies, black power attitude and techno-kinetic science manual fantasy: *"You will not edit me, my mind is beyond. You could catch a flash of the image of a master with a linear phallus, blew a path through 60 second deception, promised me that palace, benefactor Downs syndrome..."* Suddenly the voices get so bleached and filtered they come out like a sandy sludge. These are just the entrees. *"I'll curse yer, I'll kiss yer"* serenades rapper Sensational from the Wordsound label, sounding like his throat's just been cut. For the finale there's the dreadnought bass beat, drones and groans of "When Two Worlds Collide" where Priest's quizzical/affable soft spoken rap is interrupted by tape winds and high-speed splices only to return as the savage snarling of New Kingdom's Sebastien.

Add to all this Martin's sax — sounding like some expelled member from a Moroccan trance gathering — and Justin Broadrick's veering, return-of-the-repressed guitar echoes, and you get the picture. Ice pull in a lot of sonic ground, but the tracks are given all the time and cinematic space they need to unfold in all their glory. Tracks pause and fray out, only to blast back in on the next dystopic level, and the constant grating thrust is persuasive. If Tricky smoked the whole of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* rolled in copies of *Watchmen* while sitting in a napalmed cathedral.

MATT FFYTCHE

Aube
Evocation
AUF ABWEGEN AATP03 CD

Aube
Substructural Penetration 1991-95
IRIS LIGHT I-LIGHT008 2XCD

MAZK
Sound Pressure Level
OR IF2 CD

Merzbow
Pinkream
DIRTER PROMOTIONS OPROMC037 CD

Yet more from the Nirvanas of Noise. *Evocation* manufactures sound using brainwaves from an electroencephalogram — not the first album in Akifumi 'Aube' Nakajima's vast output to dd so. Translating physical patterns seems a good ploy, on the conceptual level at least — and it feels amusing with headphones. There's plenty of structuring, as Nakajima organises the noises into shapes and loops. The predominant mode is for a bleak figure to repeat underneath swooping and bubbling higher tones. Though a queasy listen, it easily avoids the morbid 'Like, wow' pit it could have fallen into.

Substructural Penetration surveys Nakajima's early recordings over two CDs, and is the first Aube release not to be drawn from a single sound source. This variety is a substantial bonus. The work on the first CD predominantly deals with arrangements of natural sounds: water and the human lungs, the second is mainly produced by oscillators. The active ambiences of the first perhaps better show the range of Nakajima's soundwarp strategies (though nearly all is at the rougher end of his work). The water pieces in particular exude a frightening life. The combinations of looping and scribbling fuzz-noise give the pieces a kind of irresistible drive, as new patterns of repetition rise unexpectedly to the surface. The word 'organic' would be quite out of place, that's for sure. The second CD plunges the listener headlong into a sterner world of full-on electronic noise. Aube is always keen to use tones as well as fuzz and there's often a kind of shrieking line in the mix somewhere. It lives on the edge of the map, just before it disappears into blank space.

MAZK is a collaboration between Merzbow's Masami Akita and Zbigniew Karkowski, formerly of The Hafler Trio — though they only work together on one ten minute piece and then they each contribute a long solo track. As usual, when working under his real name, Akita's work is less extreme. All the material here uses a subtone drone undertow as a base, which lends a slo-mo feel to the thrashings of the higher tones. The Akita solo piece is a long way from scalding electronic white-out. Perhaps more interesting, however, is the collaborative work, by virtue of appearing to throw more material into the shredder.

Pinkream is a reissue of a deleted 1996 10", with a couple of extra tracks thrown in. Once past the oddly burbling first track it's headlong into familiar and exciting territory: the unremitting rasp of the effacement of tones. These swathes of sound are the dentist's drill we can relish.

The quantity of Merzbow and Aube releases is such that only a very rich and idle person could get anywhere near keeping up. And who'd want to anyway? Both artists flood the market in an attempt to wipe out the idea of a containable body of work, just as the noise rubs out sonic distinctions. It's worth taking the temperature every now again, though.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Iva Bittovà
Iva Bittovà
NONESUCH 79455 CD

This first American release by Czech singer and violinist Iva Bittova should see the remarkable performer beguiling a far larger international audience than before. Bittovà is Improv music's answer to Hungarian folk singer Martá Sebestyén, combining the poignant influence of gypsy and other East European folk music with polished, abstract improvisation to generally dazzling effect.

This release draws on both her previous albums, *Iva Bittovà* and *Ne Nehledej*, and combines a spare, uncomplicated palette (mostly just solo voice and violin) with vivid, heartfelt emotion. There's nothing simple about Bittovà's music, however, as sentences are chopped apart and sewn back together over robust, jagged fiddling. The 'songs' are often wide ranging in form, switching from high-strung propulsion (in not dissimilar vein to The Balanescu Quartet) to freeform pointillism without any problem.

On "Paraskeva", Martá gives way to Sami singer Mari Boine as a point of reference, and a slightly hesitant piano offers an uncertain but unworried counterpoint. Elsewhere, the frantic repetition of "Strange Young Lady" contrasts with the whimsical quivering of "Before", while the gentle, wind-gathering tones of "The Vampire's Ball" are split asunder by raucous cackling that would make Diamanda Galás proud. This, and the freeform warbling that opens "The Little Calf", ensure it's all less immediately accessible than the other points of reference might suggest.

BRIAN DUGUID

Boards Of Canada
Music Has The Right To Children
WARP/SKAM WARPCD55/SKALD1 CD/2XLP

On their debut album, Edinburgh's Boards Of Canada craft glacial Electronica vignettes, as if working with jeweller's rouge on clouded glass recovered from the sea. *Music Has The Right To Children* sounds like pumice feels, its surfaces smooth and prehensile. These are fitting qualities, for the recording is a co-

production of inventive organic modernists Warp and gritty urban visionaries Skam

Fans of each label will no doubt take this one to the hearts of their record collections It bridges terrain made familiar from the explorations in sound by their labelmates, but its steady, saturated beats further extend developments in post-HipHop minimalism. Boards Of Canada tip a nod to rap minimalism with their occasional recourse to beatbox basics, but *Music Has The Right To Children* reveals a quieter, more subtle willfulness at work.

Most of the pieces are presented as music box miniatures The whole arguably amounts to little more than an Electronica scrapbook. In many cases there is just time to note the beauty of a pulse tone, or an apposite embellishment to a flesh-bruise beat, before a track ebbs and fades Nothing outstays its welcome, no idea is despoiled If the beats have a pliant solidity, the enveloping melodies and ambience are almost surreally seductive For all their abstraction, the voices that occasionally speak through the music are disconcertingly direct, like voices in dreams A child says *"I Love You"*, its tone and modulation altered, but its emotive impetus stays intact. Many other artists have spun found sounds into vistas of Ambient bleakness, but Boards Of Canada engender entropic restfulness with a twist, a discomfiting edge to ward off torpor While all this may seem fragmentary and insubstantial on paper, the overall experience is beguiling and engrossing

TIM OWEN

Collective 4tet
Live At Crescent
LEO LAB 043 CD

Evan Parker/John Russell/John Edwards/ Mark Sanders
London Air Lift
FMP 89 CO

The Collective 4tet comprises Jeff Hoyer (trombone), Mark Hennen (piano), William Parker (bass) and Heinz Geisser on drums. Parker is the de facto leader, but that's down to authority and experience rather than assertiveness or grandstanding Everyone gets the chance to shine Hennen's bristling runs and spiky chords, Parker's rolling pizzicato figures (sometimes remarkably interspersed with virtually simultaneous arco phrases) and Hoyer's mercurial lines mesh with Geisser's agile, apposite drumming to produce well-integrated group improvisations Two of the tracks are just under 34 minutes long, but there is little padding. The group achieves a fine balance of ebb and flow, and has an excellent instinct for developing dramatic structure on the hoof

The starry cast on *London Air Lift* promises much, and delivers an impressive consignment of fulfilled commitments Like William, Evan Parker is condemned to be regarded as the leader, even when the quartet is made up of such exceptional musicians as Sanders, Russell and Edwards after all, the cover does say "Evan Parker with " He plays with such authority, brings so much experience and achievement to a performing situation, that anything he does which falls short of perfection prompts disappointment. It's an unreasonable level of expectation, especially in a genre where the edge of risk, of spontaneity, the knowledge that the music is not pre-formed, polished and tidily reproduced, is what gives much of the listening satisfaction A large measure of the pleasure is knowing that the music could go any way, that it is still being planned and re-directed as it unfolds

The snag with recordings of Improv is that the decisions have already been made, the risks already taken, the outcome is already known That can be a problem when unpredictability and unfamiliarity are the only merits With these players the difficulty doesn't arise the apparently effortless interactions, the unerring ability to make the right choice of phrase, texture and mood, the perfection of the interfaces between each improvisor's contribution creating a seamless whole, suggest that the music couldn't have been any other way, yet the knowledge that it could have been tedious or catastrophic in lesser hands preserves the sense of excitement and anticipation even after repeated hearings

BARRY WITHERDEN

The Electric Eels
The Beast 999 Presents The Electric Eels In Their Organic Majesty's Request
OVERGROUND RECORDS OVER71 CD

Various Artists
Those Were Different Times
SCAT RECORDS SCAT45 3X10" LP

Brian McMahon
An Inch Equals A Thousand Miles
CRAB POT RECORDS CBPT102 LP

There were only four Cleveland groups worth getting excited about during the early 70s, when punk was in its infancy Tin Huey from nearby Akron, David Thomas's Rocket From The Tombs, Mirrors and The Electric Eels Tin Huey went on to record their only album *Contents Dislodged During Shipment* for Warner Brothers, Rocket mutated into Pere Ubu, Mirrors recorded a single for Ubu's Hearthan label before burrowing deeper underground, and The Electric Eels only posthumously released "Agitated" as their debut single for Rough Trade Despite their enduring reputation, the Eels lasted a mere two years, a turbulent, occasionally violent, career where they played only a handful of gigs and had no records released

In 1989 the US Tinnitus label released *Having A Philosophical Investigation With The Electric Eels* album, the first full length Eels record and the blueprint for all subsequent CD versions, of which *Their Organic Majesties* is the latest. Time has not softened its punch Cataloguing the bulk of the Eels' original material, it captures them at the peak of their performing power The Eels at this time were made up of guitarists John Morton and Brian McMahon, drummer Nick Knox (who would later team up with The Cramps) and singer/clarinettist Dave McManus, whose wild onstage presence included a shock of frizzed hair and an outfit that was held together with rat traps. Highlights include the aforementioned "Agitated", with its pre-Cramps psychobilly drum thud, the sprawling, guitar driven "Cyclotron" and, best of all, "Jaguar Ride", a song that pouts New York Dolls style, while still retaining the Eels' venomous, avant garde stance Crank up "No Nonsense" really high and it could easily be *Spunk*-era Sex Pistols yelping through your speakers Proof indeed that The Electric Eels circa 1972 were punk rock's original and best.

For further enlightenment hunt down Scat's triple 10" vinyl set *Those Were Different Times*, a collection of rare sessions from the Eels, The Mirrors and the lesser known (but still active) Styrenes This neatly mops up the remaining dregs of the Eels' shortlived career for the fan who has to have everything, but there is still enough of interest locked in these raw grooves (the glorious, politically incorrect "You Crummy Fags" being one choice moment) to warrant attention.

The Electric Eels may be history but the legend lives on through ex-Eels guitarist Brian McMahon, whose latest solo project *An Inch Equals A Thousand Miles* has just leaked on to the streets. With all the poetic and electric exuberance of early post Velvets Lou Reed, McMahon's latest venture allows his unique skills as a guitarist and writer of surprisingly beautiful songs to shine through, and reflect on a part of rock history that is only now just coming to light.

EDWIN POUNCEY

Luc Ferrari
Presque Rien
INA/MUSIDISC 245172 CD

François Bayle
Son Vitesse Lumière Vols 9 & 10
INA/MUSIDISC 247392 2XCD

Michel Redolfi
Detours
MIRAGE MUSICAL MM303 CO

Daniel Teruggi
Instants D'Hiver — Summer Band
INA/MUSIDISC 245782 CD

Bernard Parmegiani
De Natura Sonorum
INA C3001 CO

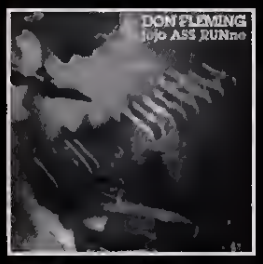
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(SWARF FINGER) CD
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SPLEEN - MY TRACKS
(SWARF FINGER) CD
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OON FLEMING - JoJo ASS RUNne
(GOD BLESS RECORDS) CD
First full length solo album by New York rock guru Don Fleming Think Glenn Branca on a flipper trip with a twist of lemon...



G FORCE -
ELECTRONIC LESSON PART 2
(KK RECORDS) 2LP/CD
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Wicked! (Billy Nasty) Playing (Mark Broom)

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Phuture303
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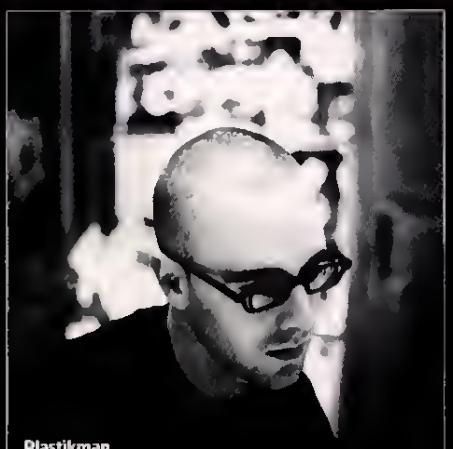
Jeff Mills
Purpose Maker
REACT CD/LP

Plastikman
Consumed
NOVAMUTE NOMU65 CD/LP

Three albums from House and Techno veterans, all launched from the Great Lakes area at similar speeds but landing on quite different planets. Ironically, Phuture3D3's debut album comes 11 years after their epochal "Acid Trax" single of 87 (only Earl 'Spanky' Smith Jr remains from the original line-up). But their continuing pulse-rich exploration of the Roland TB 303 and its squelchy bass patterns is more than merely flashback. The title track moves with the precision of an electric piston. This isn't glossy arpeggio dreamland — the rhythms and patterns spark with static electricity, surrounded by filtered synth notes and a simmering, shaking sound somewhere between tambourines and white noise. "Phuture Is Calling You" has a jaunty clattering beat and a hissing cymbal sound that scatters iron filings over an undulating synth sequence which disappears into a muffled burring bass, then crests as sparking bleeps.

There's a body-pounding, convulsive feel to all of this, which at the same time never loses its minimalist tautness. Where Electro's newer Minimalists such as To Rococo Rot seem to stare at blank, abstract horizons, this still feels like it's wrestling with demons in the urban system. *"I moved with it. . . and I lost it"* croaks a cyber voice on "I'm Losing It" amid a viscous sound, like rippling metallic water with digitised shoals of bleeps. He lost it all right, but found something better: a bleeping, rotor-chopping and whining machine both alienating and hypnotic. As the processes of technology swim in and out of emotional focus, voices droning the word *"phuture"* slow to mud or speed up helium-style. In fact, with the vinyl you can mess with the speed yourself and create two albums — at 45 the voices speed up to normal frequencies while the music hits gabber territory.

Ex of Detroit's Underground Resistance, Jeff Mills's *Purpose Maker* extends his individual take on Techno built out of sample-based repetitions. Rhythmically the loops have a juddering quality — something to do with a one-and-a-half-second snatch caught in mid-stride (an effect that crops up in Steve Reich's early sample work). This gives all the tracks a packed, percussive feel, rather than a sleek, throbbing one. Added to this, Mills seems to be going for something more hot and exotic here. Tracks have titles such as "The Dancer", "Casa", "Cubango" and "Tango" and, though hardly carnival music, at times he manages to bring out a tropical heat from the loops. Recurring accents reminiscent of maracas, manimbas and machinic cowbells fuse with the constant pounding beat. But this is not Techno with a lounge-exotica overlay. Instead, the result is a strangely indefinable intensity created out of superimposing gritty, grainy textures with a feelgood rubberiness. A beach party for helicopter blades.


Plastikman

Richie Hawtin's new Plastikman album is the least captivating in this company. In fact it seems to demand a certain cessation of attention. Unhurried minimal and muffled pulses, distant icy synth chords, *Consumed* has a brooding, reverberating, monochromatic feel — what might be left over from Photek if his *Modus Operandi* was denuded of the flashing sword beatwork. Metronomic rather than motonk, the tracks register a hypnotic after-image of Techno, as if constant exposure has imprinted regular pulse patterns on the brain that emerge in the depths of sleep — a pendular swinging of eternity like listening to surf on a beach. "Convulse [sic]" has no pulse except the reverberation of falling moments, but you couldn't exactly call it dub influenced. If factories dream of electric eternity this is how it might sound. Space station emptiness free of humanoid interference storms.

MATT FFYTCHE

associated with GRM — the Groupe de Recherches Musicales — which is the focus for electronic music in France. Founded as the Groupe de *Musique Concrète* by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry in 1951, the group became GRM when Henry left in 1957. The change was significant. *Musique concrète* describes the pieces created by Schaeffer and Henry in the 40s and early 50s, taking natural sounds as a basis. Pure electronic music rejected natural sounds in favour of purely synthetic ones based on the sine curve. But a lot of electronic music, starting with Stockhausen's *Gesang Der Junglinge*, combines both approaches. That's true of most of the music here.

Pierre Schaeffer wrote, "From the moment you accumulate sounds and noises, deprived of their dramatic connotations [their natural meaning] you cannot help but make music." In contrast, audio-artists like Douglas Kahn look for a non-musical art of sound. Schaeffer tried to free his material from its native associations, to create pure sound objects — for instance, by removing the opening instants of a sound and transforming it. Pure electronic music gets that result directly, while cutting all associations built up with traditional musical instruments. But people develop *another* set of associations, even if it's only to giggle at what sound like springs going 'boing' or bodily functions unmentionable in a family publication like this one.

Luc Ferran was a founder-member of GRM, and his album is closest to *musique concrète*. Like John Cage, he's an art subversive, and the "electro-acoustic nature photographs" on *Presque Rien* (*Almost Nothing*) indicate why. "Presque Rien No 1: Le Lever Du Jour Au Bord De La Mer", a "realistic picture of a fishing village coming to life", involves static microphones and a light studio touch, with minimal cutting and editing, as the ubiquitous cricket noises gradually take over.

"Presque Rien No 2" is very different. The microphones seek out various elements of the soundscape, and the subtitle "The Night Continues In My Multiple Head" means the cataclysmic frenzy of storm and rain is transformed into a "psychoanalysis of [the composer's] own landscape at night". The change is shocking compared to what went before. On "Music Promenade" Ferrari completely abandons Cage's non-intervention to entertainingly explore marching sounds, with military fanfares and band music, barked commands and applause, while synthesized sounds comment on the found material.

François Bayle, director of GRM between 1966-97, spent his early life in Madagascar, and describes his works rather portentously as "sound Utopias exploring the genesis of sound forms and movements... their relationship to events in the physical and psychic world". Volumes nine and ten of *Son Vitesse Lumière* (*Light, Speed, Sound*) move towards the electronic rather than *musique concrète* end of the spectrum, but the detail of the programme doesn't seem justified by the slow-changing result. High pitched metallic twitterings and warblings, and white noise, are frequent features. But there's more interest than in Michel Redolfi's *Detour* — the most 'Ambient' and least impressive of the albums, peppered with cliches ranging from ethereal choirs to insect noises.

Daniel Teruggi's excellent *Instants d'Hiver* — *Summer Band* is a much more compelling creation. Teruggi, GRM's current Artistic Director, creates Acousmatic Music incorporating the sound of real instruments. On "Summer Band", he celebrates the accordion of his native Argentina. Charming and affectionate, but also at times dark and eerie, this piece captures and exaggerates the wheezing and whining of the tango squeezebox.

But by some way the most remarkable of these discs is Bernard Parmegiani's *De Natura Sonorum* (1975), which is as tightly organised as Luc Ferrari is free. Born in 1927, Parmegiani is the most important figure of the Paris school, and he moulds his sound materials intuitively, an improvisatory approach in contrast to Pierre Schaeffer's meticulous planning.

All the same, *De Natura Sonorum* comes across as totally concentrated, almost a symphony of electronic music. Natural sounds are rarely recognisable as such, and there's slow textural drifting rather than the abrupt transitions of earlier *musique concrète*. The work is divided into two series, each of six movements, the first featuring instrumental

sounds as well as concrete and electronic elements. Each movement is a study of a particular kind of sound. The "elastic study", for instance, treats sounds from instruments with elastic skins and vibrating strings, at times creating an effect like an energetic squash game.

Not even Teruggi — or Ferran when he drops his Cage act — approaches this intensity. Parmegiani's sounds have an absurdity about them, but the music is more than simply amusing or mildly diverting. Like the best of electroacoustic music, there's a transparency about its processes of creation. It shows that music isn't *really* about anything — the investigation of sounds is an activity carried out by Parmegiani for its own sake. *De Natura Sonorum* is an essential recording of contemporary music.

ANDY HAMILTON

Fretless AZM
Oceans Of Light
HOLISTIC HOLC032 CD

Money Mark
Push The Button
MO' WAX MW090CDP CD

Max Brennan (aka Fretless AZM) has previously described his music as "a collision of electronic and funk influences", his fourth album for Holistic, *Oceans Of Light*, confirms that view. Scattered electronics can't shroud his affection for Parliament and Sly Stone. There's also an improvisational element at play on some songs that become laden with progressively serene electronics, swelling up and then pulling away at the tip of the crescendo, then falling into murky, fish tank atmospherics. On others, the improvisations merely lead back to the dry groove out of which they evolved. The formula's potency is best shown on "Yassassin", where the slothful guitar funk and rising scales of hollow, fermenting Electronica have an almost ceremonial vibe. In all, the album undoubtedly requires repeated airings to fully appreciate its refinements. Personally, I wouldn't have the patience.

'Eclectic' is one of those easy, somewhat tired generalisations lazily applied to artists, but Money Mark (nee Mark Ramos-Nishita) genuinely earns the right to the description. *Push The Button* encompasses a wide range of musical styles. Each new track momentarily fools you into a brisk evaluation of its supposed genre, until you cotton on that, as a whole, the album cannot be confined inside a single definition. On the multicultural "Crowns", alternating piano and flute solos, spaced-out organ, trumpet, xylophone and bongos forge a deluxe sound. Though Mark's malleable vocal generates uncanny comparisons with Elvis Costello and Stephen Duffy, he can muster an all-encompassing croon of his own, like on "All The People", where he is supported by an aching guitar tremolo and slow, seedy organ. Elsewhere, the stoned balladry of "Hand In Your Head" grabs you by the collar, kicks playfully and leaves tiny shivers dotted down your spine, the instrumental minimalism of "Dha Teen Ta" uses tabla and Asian flute samples to create a dusk-to-dawn ambience, "Trust" is tripped out Primal Scream. And on "Poor Shakes" he shifts from eclectic to eccentric mode for the introductory prologue about a singing monkey. Acerbic, witty and an early contender for album of the year.

VELIMIR PAVLE ILIC

Lisa Gerrard & Pieter Bourke
Duality
4AD CAD8004 CD

On first listen, what is immediately apparent is how warm this disc sounds in comparison to Lisa Gerrard's debut solo album, *The Mirror Pool*. Perhaps the presence of Dead Can Dance cohort Pieter Bourke makes the difference, but in comparison to the previous album's coolness, the scales here are much more friendly. It's still recognisably Gerrard's work, and her voice is just as pliable, distending over a wide range of inflections and ranges. But the only big surprise on *Duality* is "The Human Game". Its sequenced pseudo-Bond theme brings to mind John Barry. Otherwise, the Eastern European influence is still detectable — "The Unfolding" in particular summons images of elderly peasant women gathered in ornate churches, closing their eyes in memory of their dead.

Dead Can Dance have always had an affinity with the Holy Minimalism of Górecki/Pärt/Tavener, and the association continues with "The Circulation Of Shadows". Meanwhile, the ghosts of past songs are raised on tracks like "Sacrifice", which eerily recalls "Sanvean" from *The Mirror Pool*. When Gerrard sang the latter at her last London concert, she dedicated it to all the people she'd lost over the years. Through association, "Sacrifice" is almost as emotional. The album adds up to an exhilarating pretext to the next Dead Can Dance release.

VELIMIR PAVLE ILIC

Kenny Process Team
Trav'lin Light With
GUIDEO MISSILE GUIDE23C MC

This recording of a live gig in Lancaster showcases many of the golden tracks that Kenny Process Team have been airing over the past year. How to describe the Kenny process? They're about spangly, short-and-sweet instrumental breaks, melodic guitar riffs with that light and jaunty quality found in African pop and the less morose of 80s indie guitar groups, plus a baroque rhythmic complexity — the intricate, carnivalesque detail of classical South American guitar work. Much of the sound depends on the way the two guitars and bass move rhythmically out of phase with each other. The method produces mesmerising counterpoints and subrhythms with sudden shifts of gear, where the music sounds as though it's being played backwards. Many of these new tracks, such as "Fantastic Four", also evoke the hypnotically intertwined guitars of Captain Beefheart's "Kandy Korn". In contrast, the winning "Tug" is simplicity itself, all beautiful understated guitar work, colourful, interlaced melodies and feelgood bounciness.

Tightly detailed, and yet played with a knees-up nursery rhyme panache, there's a compulsive liveliness in the way the different stylistic colours mesh into each other. Is that a rolling Who bassline beneath a Villa-Lobos guitar break? What's going on here? How did they escape the rigours of time and geography to produce something that stays so coherent and resilient, wittily incongruous without ever collapsing into ironic cut-up? It's a complex, unbelievable sound — yet it's as easy as sunshine and Bermuda shorts.

MATT FFYTCHE

Khaled
Hafla
BARCLAY 539881 CD

Rachid Taha
Diwan
BARCLAY 539953 CD

Rai superstar Khaled's latest disc is compiled from two concerts last summer in France and Belgium. All the trappings of stadium rock are here: fetid washes of synth, tom-tom rolls cascading like sewage, flatulent saxophone solos. The audience, deliriously singing along to the French language hit "Aicha", clearly love it. In fact there's plenty of evidence here for those Jeremiahs who would have us believe the whole world is in thrall to the most bombastic and hollow elements of American popular culture.

The truth is maybe more complex. Khaled's starry status is founded on the extraordinary achievement of several top ten hits in France, sung in Arabic. The first of these was "Didi", from the Don Was produced album *It's Too Late To Stop Now*. Was foregrounded the Arabic elements in the music and laid foundations of stripped funk bass and drums underneath. Khaled's passionate voice amidst the hypertense tambourines and frame drums creates an edgy, compelling sound. The same song on the live album is slack and cheapened, and Khaled seems tired — the sound of laurels being rested upon. Khaled is no doubt a cultural icon of some importance, but this record, even down to the sleeve, has a chilly impersonality.

More interesting is *Diwan*, produced by Steve Hillage and featuring the young Algerian singer Rachid Taha. Hillage has a connection with France stretching back to playing guitar in Gong, those 60s serenaders of the Flying Teapot. *Diwan* is the latest in a string of rai albums produced by Hillage for the French market, using a strong team of British based

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Royal Trux
Accelerator
DOMINO WIGCD45 CD

Ten years down the tunnel and Royal Trux apparently have no intention of applying the brakes just yet. As the title of their seventh album implies, vocalist Jennifer Herrema and guitarist Neil Hagerty (Trux's principal players) may have decided to change lanes while travelling down rock's Route 666, but their collective cloven hoof is still slammed down hard on the gas pedal. After a decade of near neglect, Royal Trux are suddenly going places.

The recent *Singles, Live, Unreleased* is an essential, instant Trux primer for the newly converted, but more importantly it boxes up the group's past to present it in an archival form that is instantly accessible. If you've been riding shotgun from the start, however, it has the distinct feeling of an old skin being elegantly discarded to allow a shinier beast to emerge.

Accelerator retains Herrema and Hagerty's passionate affairs with rock 'n' roll, TV and painting, the three mediums which continue to massage their combined creativity. Rock abstraction is the potent force that powers Royal Trux, though, and that same quirky *Exile On Main Street* deep soul slickness which could be heard slithering around the production floor on their *Cats And Dogs* and *Thank You* albums uncoils and raises its cobra head here.

Those who bailed out in disgust when Royal Trux "went commercial" and signed a two record deal with Virgin several years ago should be encouraged by *Accelerator* to return to the fold. Here Royal Trux have pulled out all the stops and made a record that could, with no surrender, actually cross over to infect a new generation of rock fans. Listeners who are deaf to the critical crossfire of underground snipers, but know a good riff when they hear one.

Accelerator is full of them. "I'm Ready" is an opener that comes out fighting, an elbowing, push-and-shove bellow of bravado, complete with Hagerty's frolicking guitar solo, which scotches any preconceptions of the group's latest direction. At the same time it sets the stage for the entire record. This is a playful, repeat-play album full of choice moments, from the sub Dylanesque harmonica honk driving "Yellow Kid" to the slinky, kinky, noisy bubblegum pop of "Juicy Juicy Juice", which sounds as though it has mutated out of some early


Neil and Jennifer

70s *Boogie Nights* hot tub orgy experience. Another simple, effective and deadly song (armed with a guitar riff that Primal Scream would kill for) is "Liar", which is akin to what The Stones were aiming for when Mick Taylor joined them, only more hallucinogenic: a stripped down, back-to-basics, bloody knuckled scraping of the original Delta blues barrel, where the full impact of rock's primordial punch hits low and hard to double you up with joy. It is Royal Trux's personal vision of how rock works, however, that makes these songs special. The influences they have allowed to seep into their technique are, at first, lovingly embraced, before being turned inside out, until only a hazy feeling of the original reference is audible.

Their Americanised customisation of everything that made rock music exciting in the first place — attached to a psychedelic Stooges performing stance that defies its audience to throw the first bowling ball — is what keeps Royal Trux alive. Think of *Accelerator* as being the 90s equivalent of Blue Cheer's *Vincebus Eruptum*. Yes, that good.

EDWIN POUNCEY

musicians, including the ever reliable percussion of Hossam Ramzy, the oud of Nabil Khaldi and the dark-toned flute of Aziz Ben Salem. Taha has a voice full of character and there's always something engaging going on in the arrangements. The songs are carefully organised for rhythmic variety, from the dark sway of "Bent Sahara" (a minimalist flute and percussion genre from the Algerian Sahara) to the chugging skiffle of "Bani Al Insane" (a political lyric from Morocco). Several old school Arabic songs appear — particularly strong are the big melody of "Ya Rayah" by major songwriter Dahmane El Arrachi, and "Habina" from a 1952 movie starring actor/singer Farid El Atrache. Hillage gives this classic material a sturdy 90s production — the drums are up to date without being what you'd call danceable. For a record that's clearly aiming at mega sales, this is a very enjoyable exploration of Arabic repertoire.

CLIVE BELL

Ulf Langheinrich
Degrees Of Amnesia
ASPHODEL 0981 CD

Ulf Langheinrich spent the first year of his life in an East German hospital with a nasty ear infection that affected his hearing until the age of six. Unsurprisingly, his musical work doesn't lack the quality of attention. The pieces on this, his first solo album, date mainly from 1994-96 and are stubborn, unyielding stretches of electronic sound. The first four pieces are 'pulses', but thereafter any idea of rhythm is out of the window. The interest is not so much in repetition as in finding a better way to throb. Apparently he sees his work as an engagement with despair, but these sounds are too rich and alive to fit into a conventionally grey and desensitised niche. He builds rich, layered drones, sets them in motion and then works ingenious manipulations on the various elements. What makes them flow so thickly is the way he builds an unsentimental human physicality into the life of the pieces. So, as well as tower blocks through rainy windows, the music offers a cargo of ambiguous pleasure (at least between my possibly warped ears). Langheinrich normally works as part of performance group Granular Synthesis, who specialise in "media terrorism". The music, however, is not a music of assault: its protest makes itself felt in the absorption and re-claiming of crushing cycles of repetition. What starts out with the dubious promise of a symphony of greys turns into a vibrant weave of sounds. Once you get used to the crabbed pace of the changes it opens into the kind of ceaselessly fascinating album that seems to behave differently each time you play it.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Alvin Lucier/Björn Nilsson/Zoltán Jeney
With A Minimum Of Means
CONTENT SAK46102 CD

Howard Skempton
Home And Abroad
CONTENT SAK46101 CD

If composition is about making sounds, it is also about silence and listening. These elements, inextricable to the end, are nothing new, although the (gradual) development of analogue and digital technologies have allowed new observations to be made and new paths forged. With Robert Ashley, Gordon Mumma and David Behrman, Alvin Lucier was a member of the mid-60s outfit Sonic Arts Union. Using technology to make sounds that would never, in ordinary circumstance, reach human ears, they set about a joyful deconstruction of sound. The ensuing harmonic release, as composers such as Ligeti was then showing, could open up a rich, strange soundworld. Lucier's contribution to *With A Minimum Of Means* is the original 1970 recording of *I Am Sitting In A Room* (1969), for voice and tape. Lucier speaks a short passage slowly: *"I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and am going to play it back... again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that the semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed..."* And that's it. Except it is not. On the original and first few repeats, you're aware that Lucier's speech stumbles, he stutters on the sibilants. The piece is as much about smoothing irregularities (that Lucier admits to) to conducting a disappearing act. As the tape sound quickly disintegrates (by the 12 minute midway point, the upper range is echoing like rubbed glass), the harmonics crash through like a tidal wave. By 23 minutes, you're left with waves of sound, Lucier and not Lucier.

Of the two remaining works here, Nilsson's *CXLI Greetings To La Monte Young* and Jeney's *Kato NK 300, July 22, 1979, 10:30am* are closer, in their remorseless repetition, to the minimal orientations that this CD hints at. The first, predicated on Young's *arabic numeral* (sic), in which a heavy noise is repeated for as regularly and as long as the

performer desires, and the second, made up entirely of two sounds repeated in various patterns, show a pure approach to rhythm that also suggests, through the various musical instructions that make up the scores, an interest in performance as a circumscribed event. While all three composers here are, perhaps, at heart Cageians, only Lucier's piece shows any sense of expansion. The other two are reductive, working with their own severe frameworks.

In 1971, Howard Skempton bought an accordion to use at Scratch Orchestra events. With Cornelius Cardew as its co-founder, the Orchestra eschewed the elitism that comes from virtuosity and set about redefining its musical hierarchy. It was — what one might term in these post-Diana days — the people's orchestra. So it's not surprising that Skempton's 33 tunes for solo accordion have a folky, jaunty feel, evoking hurdy gurdies, fairgrounds and shanties. Written during a 20 year span, beginning in 1972, these pieces are the antithesis to the (theoretical) endlessness of the former CD, capturing something of the moment in their brevity. And within this, Skempton achieves an admirable balance between the rigorous compositional structures of these works and the sheer pleasure of hearing them. Delightful.

LOUISE GRAY

Joe Maneri
Paniots Nine
AVANT 067 CD

Mat Maneri Quintet
Acceptance
HATOLOGY 512 CD

Pandelis Karayorgis & Mat Maneri
Lift And Poise
LEO LAB CD041 CD

At last, the tapes made by Joe Maneri for Atlantic in 1963 see the light of day. Gunther Schuller had persuaded the label to let Maneri's quartet make a demo, which Atlantic chose not to pick up on. Crazy, but you can see how: if Maneri's music sounds odd now, it must have sounded unearthly then. The extraordinary tunes on *Paniots Nine* mix jazz with klezmer and Greek music. The rhythms are of Balkan complexity: 7/8 and 9/8. The saxophone solo on the title track alone is enough to alert anyone to Maneri's striking originality — a big, rough tone, microtones played with immense precision. At a time when freedom was becoming associated with abandonment, Maneri's grip on the wheel was steady. Among a number of superb clarinet performances, an 11 minute klezmer piece recorded in 1981 stands out. Undoubtedly, his vision has been better realised on the albums following his recent return from obscurity, but this is a remarkable document. More early Maneri tapes, including a 1950s experimental film score with speeded up and slowed down tapes, apparently exist — let's hope *Paniots Nine* whets enough appetites to draw them out.

The Mat Maneri Quintet comprises Maneri, Gary Valente on trombone, John Dirac on guitar, Ed Schuller on bass and Randy Peterson on drums. Father Joe makes a blinding contribution to the title track. Mat Maneri plays viola (instead of his six-string violin). The album's key track is the 15 minute "Shroud". Both bass and guitar parts feature 12 tone rows and improvisation, viola and trombone engage with these in an agonisingly slow and beautiful encounter. Randy Peterson's percussion glues the piece together in typically fugitive manner. Like his father, Mat enjoys overturning standards. "My Funny Valentine" is picked apart like never before.

The music is even more glancing and evasive on *Lift And Poise*, the second Karayorgis/Mat Maneri piano/violin duo album. It's made up of seductively halting performances built around silence and cramped suggestion. What's odd about this work is the way it can be simultaneously unconventional on the rhythmic, harmonic and melodic planes while retaining a powerful emotional kick. To these ears, it's even more successful than the quintet work. Both Joe and John Lockwood (on bass) fit easily into the discussion on a couple of tracks.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Donald Miller & Michael J Schumacher
Flood
WARPODISC WD04 CD

Lhasa Cement Plant
I Am Providence
FLYDADDY 032 CD

Borbetomagus
L'Atlas Des Galaxies Etranges
NON MI PLACE 01 LP

As the diligent owner of the entire Borbetomagus oeuvre, I can claim at least a familiarity with Donald Miller's guitar methods, even if, after listening for the better part of 20 years, I still don't really comprehend how he does it. Few musicians have maintained such an implacable course. He says in the notes to *Flood*: "Michael [Schumacher] manages to bow his [guitar] from nearly a foot away. I am known for disemboweling mine." Well, that's a little emotive. What Miller does is create an indefinite roar which attains a sort of grotesque stasis over long stretches of time. It's too ugly to be trance-like, but it's not far-fetched to see it as some profane doppelganger of New Age music.

Schumacher comes on as the nice guy but it seems likely that he's more than Miller's willing dupe here. It's impossible to tell exactly who's doing what, anyway. The major piece (at least in terms of length) is the live showpiece "Lamentation On The Death Of Thrash Metal", which is 29:49 of grindingly slow, rolling guitars. "The Broken Wind" is a hymn of distortion, "Coronath On The Suicide Of Thomas Billsbie" is suitably solemn. It's hard to evade sacred motifs in discussing this stuff since there's more than a hint of religious ceremony about the process and atmosphere that Miller and Schumacher work with. Communicants may find it a bit of a test, but hey, 40 days in the wilderness wasn't easy going either.

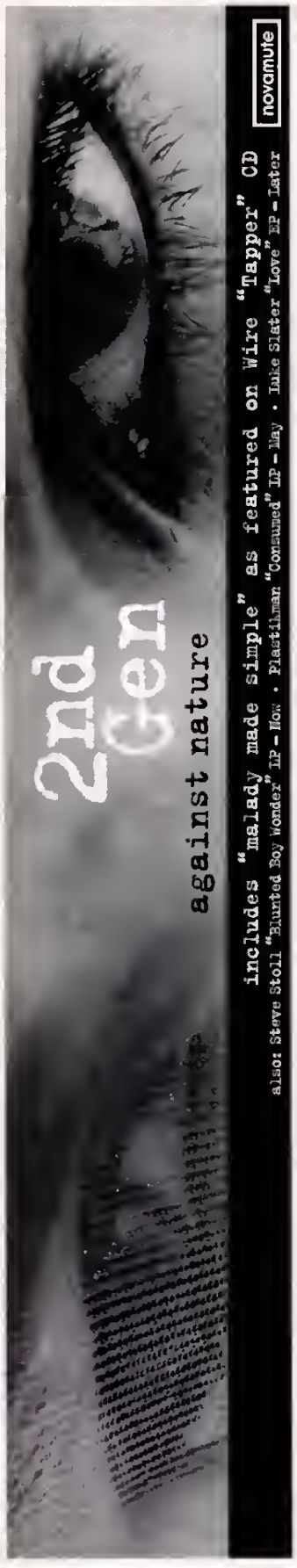
Nor is the 40 minutes (almost) of "The Eric Zann Memorial Barbecue", which constitutes the contents of the Lhasa Cement Plant CD. This is Miller with Brian Doherty on second guitar, plus bassist Philip Smith and drummer Styx Donnelly. Resembling an old-fashioned blues jam in parts, this puts its feet down in rock thanks to the rhythm section, which here and there actually gets a nice shuffle beat going. Well, sort of. Otherwise there is a lot of overamplified madness which the audience at the Terrastock festival seem to enjoy — not that you can hear a peep out of them until the end. Where *Flood* is all darkness and full-fathom-five compression, *I Am Providence* lumbers mightily around.

Back to the dark for *L'Atlas Des Galaxies Etranges*, another 40 minutes of Borbetomagus music by the old firm of Miller, Jim Sauter and Don Dietrich, recorded live in France in 1993. I have to admit that I'm unsure of how to measure the group's advance over the years. On record, it's more a question of how truthfully they've been set down rather than any qualitative distinction that sets the discs apart from each other. When the saxophonists lock horns over Miller's calm brutalities, they return to the continuous crescendo which the group perhaps sees as its pure destiny. The initial reaction is either repulsion or exhilaration, but invest enough time in it and, as the players surely intend, the grain of the music begins to emerge. Either that or I've finally been driven deaf.

RICHARD COOK

Natural Language
Natural Language 0098
EMT EMT0098 CD

Centering largely around Minimalism, this full-length debut from British composer and sound sculptor Hywel Davies features exiguously organic compositions, with an ambience rooted in utter darkness. The opening track, "We Are Learning About Blue", sets the tone using a series of hand-cast temple bowls to create a sporadic theme, although it's the silence and space in the music that also helps to build the tension. At times it can be unsettling, as on "Le Repos Du Sable", where the single-note buzzing of the cello expands and vibrates, and becomes sonorously mournful as it languishes in its own despondency. Davies's collection of lengthy curios intertwine beautifully, held together by the purity of their austere texture. In this





Various Artists
Classic Plant
LEAF BAY3 CD/2XLP

Various Artists
Invisible Soundtracks: Macro 2
LEAF REEL3 CD

Various Artists
Sounds From The Electronic Lounge
REACT REACT123 CD

Launched in late1994, the Leaf Label has produced a series of adroit Electronica EPs over the last three years. Some of the tracks have surfaced again on this *Classic Plant* compilation, including Boymerang's drum 'n' bass debut "The Don" — an epic of unbridled joy. In tandem with "Autumnal" (the other Graham Sutton piece on this collection) it offers an intelligent, lilting clarity, but the stilted accordion and regal drum 'n' bass arrangement of the latter piece slip easily under the skin, ploughing parallel lines of uneasy duality. Such a mood of irascibility runs through many of the compositions here, and are particularly salient in the raw, industrious groove and lamentable utterance of Four Tet's "Field", the dark, Coil-esque angle of Witchman's "4am On Point", and the portent, filmic majesty of Luger's "Pass Agent". The whole compilation is underpinned by a seam of stark, channelled anxiety, becoming dysfunctional in Richard Thomas's disjointed "Manicougan 5".

Following briskly on the heels of last year's *Macro 1*, *Invisible Soundtracks: Macro 2* revolves around a similarly intrinsic concept — a variety of artists producing individual slices of music, each designed to elicit some form of cinematic image. The diversity is astounding, beginning with Polyester Orkester (aka Henrik Johansson)'s minimal, evocative "Aldrigpunkt". As it plays, a clear picture forms of a deserted beach on a greyishly dull afternoon, with a man walking towards the incoming ocean tide. As the cool blue salt-water begins to consume him, he feels a sudden sensation of breathlessness as he's pulled down in slow, excruciating detail. b Low's Patrick Pulsinger and Erdem Tunakan continue where Pulsinger's self-explanatory *Porno* album left off. *Macro 2*'s comucopian subculture forms an incredibly complex web. The tracks complement one another wonderfully well — the flawed sub-blues elegance of Fridge's "Beaf" projects a kind of comforting, moth-eaten quality; and Warren Defever (of 4AD group His Name Is Alive) contributes two scintillating electronic miniatures. He's in good company: Paul D Miller's "He Who Leaves No Trace" sounds like a thousand synchronised flies buzzing around your head in E flat, while Ian Eccles-Smith's "Driftnet" is terrifyingly exquisite, creating echo chambers of suspense, black sunsets and burnished eclipses, providing a more than adequate ending to the film of your dreams.

Sounds From The Electronic Lounge is released on the third anniversary of the London club founded by Robin Rimbaud, aka Scanner. Compiled by him and Holland-based Techno artist Michael Wells (aka Signs Ov Chaos), it may be the weakest of the CDs featured here, but it contains its own moments of urgency and genius. Inevitably, these are flagged by Scanner's two illustrious pieces: "Channel Vacuum" is an army of brittle-shelled insects backing distorted phone conversations, while the chugging saga of "Mothlight" is veiled in a splintered, sub-orchestral stratum. Few of the other tracks have the nuance to match Rimbaud. „Starfish Pool's cryptically subliminal analogue Trance becomes numb too quickly, and Mazda's intermittently playful "Logan's Run" is heading towards more of a dancefloor niche, although its calming qualities retain a strand of identity. Rimbaud has the final say with the classiest and most astonishing track here, if only for the segment of glorious, babbling organ that kicks unexpectedly into a fugal wave of layered, transcendental synthetic sweeps.

VELIMIR PAVLE ILIC

climate, even the Brownian motion of bells and wind chimes ("Blasted With Ecstasy") exist on almost the same terms as the rolling, muted reverberation of a cement mixer ("Rubber Hammer"). The silences continue to prick the imagination, as on the redolent "Sylvanshine", (which refers to the refractive raindrop illusion periodically experienced by motorists) and the piece itself conceives a haunting, paradoxical study of stillness and movement. Bass trombone and piano pervade the final track, "Not Going Gently", but the interjecting silences still portray a visceral ephemerality that is crucial to the fragile core of the album. Listen with care.

VELIMIR PAVLE ILIC

Arvo Pärt
Beatus
VIRGIN CLASSICS 724354527623 CD

Here is yet another recording of Arvo Part's music, a sonic experience so beautiful and sublime it hardly seems to be of this century. Yet this sound could not possibly come from the past. Hardly a monk, Pärt's clever, sophisticated structures suggest someone who knows this world of grime, violence and burgers, and has found a sensual, pleasurable alternative. His textures and harmonies build slowly and simply with enormous confidence, blocks of sound put in place by the smartest of bricklayers. This is music for the beginning of the next century, for compact discs and whatever comes next, allowing choirs to enjoy and exult in music that must do something wonderful to the passages in the head. To be part of a choir who sing as gloriously as the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (under conductor Tõnu Kaljuste) do on this recording must be better than chemicals or herbs.

The collection includes two seven-part suites: the introspective "Missa Syllabica" and the more exultant "Seven Magnificat-Antiphonen". The opening track is the dramatic "Statuit Ei Dominus", while the remaining five works include the lovely "Memento" and an outstanding new recording of "De Profundis", Part's setting of Psalm 123 for male voices and organ (Chnstopher Bowers-Broadbent) with bell, gong and a deep, ambient bass drum played by the conductor. But such adjectives hardly do Part justice. The subtle music requires some commitment to the composer's choral sound world. It doesn't seem to belong in ordinary modern lives, yet it has a place in Modern Life.

JOHN L WALTERS

Pulp
This Is Hardcore
ISLAND CID8066 CD/MC/LP

This isn't Pulp's second album, but it may as well be. As the long-awaited follow-up to *Different Class*, their vitriolic masterpiece which threw every other pop release at the time into sharp relief, *This Is Hardcore* will be measured in nanometres against its antecedent. That it's taken nearly three years to make is a small indication that they themselves have acknowledged the public's expectations for it.

In one sense, *This Is Hardcore* is a continuation of where the last album left off. A (no doubt) bigger budget reflects a tendency towards bigger productions, bigger string sections and more full scale arrangements from ex-officio member Anne Dudley. There is a marvellous dynamism about the songs — the way they're phrased, the way they're structured. In part, this is due to singer Jarvis Cocker's laconic eloquence, to the much undersung Candida Doyle's sub-Roxy Music keyboards, to Dudley's orchestral nouse. *This Is Hardcore*'s subject matter is pretty much par for the course from a group who at times seem like Serge Gainsbourg's secret child: less sour or impassioned than those on *Different Class*, the 12 songs return to the seedy voyeurism and nylon sheets of *His 'N' Hers*, the group's first Island album. Cocker, the gangly frontman who famously bested Michael Jackson's attempt to be more like God at the 1996 Brit Awards, leads the group through songs about ineffectual men, their fantasy relationships and tired dreams. The only thing missing in this warts and all catalogue is an admission of problems with premature ejaculation, but even so, there's real horror here, as shown by two superb pieces, "This Fear" and the album's title track. Beyond this, there are some subtle changes. Guitarist Mark Webber, the LaMonte Young enthusiast who organised last year's benefit concert for Manan Zazeela and currently runs a monthly social at the ICA called Little Stabs At Happiness, makes his extramural interests

known by contributing oscillating codas to most songs and a massive nine minute drone at the album's close It's something of a vindication for those who see Pulp as Britain's only pop art group and certainly the only Britpop outfit to consider more than the quaint nostalgias of Oasis, Blur and their awful legions. (Im)pertinent Pulp Here's to the next 20 years

LOUISE GRAY

The Raincoats
The Kitchen Tapes
ROIR RUS8238 CD

Does the format affect the message? How are we to view an erstwhile underground artefact originally released, samizdat-style, on cassette only, when it comes to us with the digital clarity of a compact disc and the added benefit of hindsight? This 1982 concert recording from New York now lies exposed in its pink packaging for 90s scrutiny We may wonder what all the fuss was about, particularly as The Raincoats have achieved a certain cult status, not least by being namedropped by Kurt and Courtney a few years back. There's an undeniable bounce and polyrhythmic fluidity to the music accompanying the flat vocal tones of "No One's Little Girl" *"I never shall be/In your family tree,"* they sing, reflecting a time when rock was becoming a pejorative term and people were both seeking alternative avenues of expression and celebrating the difference

Unfortunately, as the following tracks demonstrate, there's a nagging sense of emptiness at the centre, a tendency for songs to meander, to be swamped by their arrangements Greil Marcus's sleevenotes to the original cassette release offer some clues he talks of the "process of punk", from strength of feeling expressed through limited technique to advanced technique looking for suitable subject matter to express The method does affect the message and, in this case, the folk funk and jazzy Afrocentrisms eventually engulf The Raincoats' individuality, filing away their rough edges. At worst they fall victim to the old style-over-content charge, and in doing so tragically prefigure the worst qualities of subsequent 80s pop music.

TOM RIDGE

Soft Machine
Virtually
CUNEIFORM RUNE100 CD

Caravan
Songs For Oblivion Fishermen
HUX 002 CD

Hugh Hopper & Kramer
Huge
KNITTING FACTORY WORKS/SHIMMY DISC 088 CD

Indefatigable tape respondent and global ear Steven Feigenbaum has finally secured release for one of his best finds *Virtually* was recorded by Soft Machine on 23 March 1971 at the Gondel Filmkunsttheater in Bremen for broadcast on local radio It's been aired a few times since, but this perfectly-balanced, bravely original music deserves to be heard by anyone who thinks *Bitches Brew* is the last word in jazz rock. Radio Bremen's Peter Schulze points out that the group — after saxophonist Elton Dean's arrival, before drummer Robert Wyatt's departure — had reached a watershed between 'pataphysical rock and serious jazz. It's this tension that makes the music gripping

Schulze adds, "Unlike jazz groups, they had at their disposal an awareness of identity of sound who else played the Lowery organ apart from Mike Ratledge, or the saxello other than Elton Dean, or used spaced out bass features like Hugh Hopper, or processed voices like Robert Wyatt?" Precisely Jimi Hendrix played rhythm guitar on some early sessions, and The Softs toured as his support group According to Wyatt, they watched him in awe night after night. After this experience, they wisely refrained from finding a guitar substitute Ratledge's organ — spritely, polite, yet hinting at dementia — became their earmark, his long-held chords recalling both Purcell and bagpipes Meanwhile, Wyatt's turbulent drumming came somewhere between Ginger Baker and Keith Moon — a riotous, impatient interpretation of Elvin Jones His command of the rudiments also contributed to the folkish feel which set The Softs apart from American groups — but always as a freefloating referent within the improvisations, rather than a restrictive rhythmic frame Hugh Hopper's bass sound was electric and funky, yet his measured style suggested baroque counterpoint (without falling into the repro-Bach kitsch of Dave Brubeck or The Nice) Soft Machine's mix of English cool and American hot — of pastoral romanticism and amplified distortion — was a fertile dialectic, and there's not a dull moment on this 80 minute disc. Soft Machine the saving grace of Cuneiform's roster

Songs For Oblivion Fishermen consists of Caravan's early 70s BBC sessions Caravan were the commercial crack troops of Canterbury Rock, and here the influence of Anglican church music and folkish airs was less benign. Pye Hastings's vocals sound fey and dated. You can see the notes on the score as he sings not concrete utterance but condescending rendition of the pre-planned. *"Pulling my trousers up to my knees, I waded across the stream. "* he sings. Wyatt put an absurd twist into such rural idyll whimsy, and though Caravan try ("Virgin On The Ridiculous"), they don't have the political intelligence or indignation to break up the picnic Everything is just too snug for one to care Canterbury Rock needed something virulent — art ambition, revolution, madness — to get it rolling.

After *Adrearmor*, Hugh Hpooper's evocative encounter with Mark Hewins, *Huge* is a disappointment. Kramer's keyboards plunk sententiously and Damon Krukowski plays OK drums, but hard to discern why Hopper's bass retains its lovely pace and golden sound, but there's nothing here to engage him Kramer's spoken word tapes fail to spark. avant garde strategies as a substitute for musical thought. New Age pottering badly recorded one of those garage 'experiments' wise musicians leave on the shelf

BEN WATSON

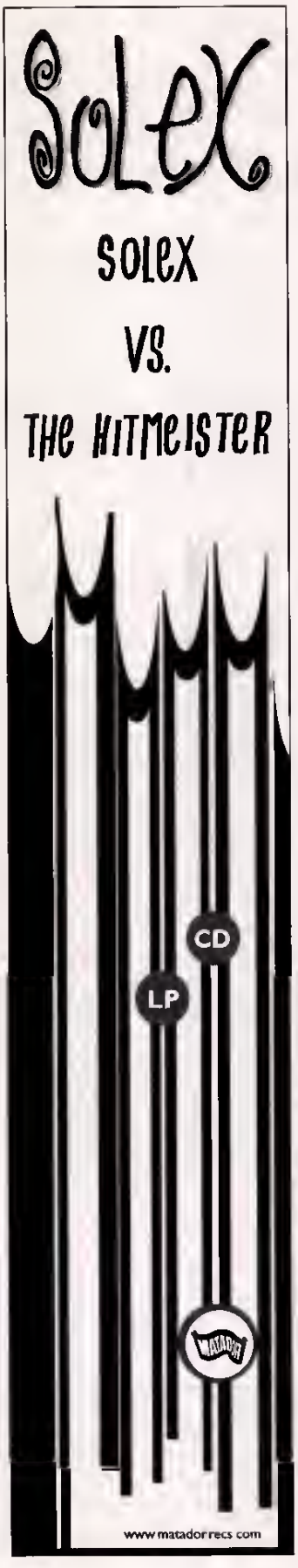
Sonic Youth
A Thousand Leaves
GEFFEN CD/LP

The combined muscle of the last three SYR EPs, and now this, Sonic Youth's most accomplished long player since *Sister*, feels like an almighty slap around the head for anyone who's forgotten where avant rock came from. Never have four gobs spewed forth more raggedy atonal guitar and extended beat-inspired poems, all in the eye-watering belief that they were, as Thurston Moore put it on *The South Bank Show*, "bolstering the tradition of rock by breaking out and freaking with it"

Paradoxically, perhaps, their relationship with Geffen has allowed them to make such a defiantly non-commercial album as *A Thousand Leaves*; they're long past the commercial breakthrough point they hovered round circa *The Year That Punk Broke* It seems that Geffen are happy enough just to have Sonic Youth on the label (plenty of cred points there and a carrot for any new signings) to let them do what they want. So there's a real laidback feel to the album, some tracks running ten minutes plus, in no hurry to work themselves out, all of which were recorded at their newly completed studio There's also a feeling, as the title suggests, of autumnal sadness and change, of watching the river flow

"Contre Le Sexisme" kicks off the album with a deliciously ghost-channelled vocal from Kim Gordon, harking back to the eerie late night majesty of the likes of *EVOL*'s "Marilyn Moore" or even "Early American" from *Kill Yr Idols* Moore and Lee Ranaldo's amps soak the piece with expectant buzz before resolving into hypnotically picked patterns over the clank of Steve Shelley's drums. It's a great opener despite Ranaldo's apparent worries that it might "scare people off" (Hey Lee, when did you grow so timid?) Moore's "Sunday" sounds like a single, combining the backwoods chug of prime Creedence with a downtown take on Neu!'s motonk pulse, pausing only to explode in all directions halfway through

"Female Mechanic Now On Duty" features one of Kim's heaviest vocals, a nasal howl that she's been refining since *Daydream Nation*, and you'd be hard pushed to find any other female vocalist working a similar turf In comparison, Moore's vocal on "Wildflower Soul" is more overtly feminine and emotionally cracked than Gordon's voice ever gets. It's





almost as if the group have completely swapped gender roles, the breathy tremble in Moore's voice being particularly affecting

Ranaldo's tracks are always a treat, and over the past few (so-so) albums, his songs have always been a highlight ("Wish Fulfilment" on *Dirty*, "Mote" on *Goo*) His "Hoarfrost" stands up to some deep listening, shedding layers of skin every time you hear it There's a strange blasted feel to his sung/spoken vocals, some nicely off-kilter voicing that renders the likes of "Karen Koltrane" (Ranaldo's second entry) virtually ungraspable on first spin It's chock-full of his patented wide-eyed take on the sadness of things, but consistently remains the right side of cringe

"Hits Of Sunshine" is a monster, a heavily breathed rumination on some of the dharma which dissolves into subtly phased guitars and minimal clipped grooves, at points almost sounding like a stripped down Funkadelic

With this album, Sonic Youth have reclaimed their crown as the godfathers of avant rock, slipping easily from propulsive two chord chuggers to strung out black hole blues, straddling genres like no one else

DAVID KEENAN

Sotto In Su featuring Sussan Deyhim

Vanitas

POISE POISE 4 CD

Thomas Heberer

Kill Yr Darlins

POISE POISE 5 CD

Sotto In Su is the brainchild of keyboard and sampler player Frank Schulte, the concept arising from lectures he gave linking ritual forms to everyday situations The texts are taken from "traditional witches' sayings, personal rituals, mantras and death chants" and the album's dedicatee is a dead artist friend of Schulte The concept might appear to err towards morbidity, but this stunning mix of music, text and vocals is realised through vital energy Schulte's sound design is realised by a fluid, semi-structured, semi-improvising group The standout musicians on the project are trumpeter Thomas Heberer and vocalist Sussan Deyhim.

Deyhim embraced the ecstatic and ritualistic with Richard Horowitz on last year's *Majoun* album Her Arabic heritage collided with Persian pop culture, and more avant garde leanings were richly woven into a totally convincing hybrid Her she concentrates more on incantation and semi-recitation, but achieves a similarly heady result. On "Sickness" her vocal exorcism is mirrored by Heberer's trumpet howls, both buoyed up by ominous drum rolls and a succession of samples and electronics mapping out a state of sonic delirium

"Epilog" finds her weaving a gorgeous melody over chirruping electronics and (presumably) a tuned percussion loop, and "Moonspell For Pleasure" is a menu for sybarites Here the sensuality that pervades her music becomes powerfully sexual Tabla loops and tolling bass drum add to the giddy, hyperventilating atmosphere and Heberer keeps order by adding cool, clear lines before exploding in a final flourish The album reminds us how in the right hands 'difficult' music can be as direct, communicative and moving as any other

Heberer has recorded a solo album, subtitled "Music For Trumpets And Keyboards 1994-96" It is an inventive sample fest, with the careening samples of "This Is A Hard Hat Area", for example, deliberately veering from timbrally poetic to trashy And there's a bit of Louis Armstrong thrown in for good measure On tracks like "Paul's Pal", his trumpet controls the melody lines over rather cumbersomely funky backing Often the record superficially hints at jazz fusion in the texture and melody lines of "Get Your Ticket Here", for example, the vibes, organ and keyboard flourishes coalesce like a deconstructed example of that debased genre "The Gunslingers' Delight" features a restless, programmed rhythm track of heavy percussion and the sound of breaking glass topped by the most poised of trumpet melodies The heterogeneous mix ultimately works by sounding only like Heberer A collaboration between him and Deyhim could be mind boggling.

MIKE BARNES

Tarwater

Rabbit Moon Revisited

CAPSTACK RECORDS CR9801 CD

Village Of Savoonga

Score

THE COMMUNION LABEL COMM48 CD

There is plenty of genre-busting activity going on here as electronic rhythms collide with unexpected layers and textures of sound At the outset, Tarwater (whose line-up includes Ronald Lippok from To Rococo Rot) throw a too-obvious red herring into the mix with the strident guitar angularity of "Rabbit Moon", thereafter they prove themselves to be a more elusive and tantalising proposition as they skate nimbly across a mutable landscape of musical arrangements But although there is undoubtedly plenty of variety on offer — the mutated bossa nova of "Second Aethyr", the restrained minimalism of "Euroslut", for example — Tarwater's most successful approach seems to be in their fierce streamlining of sound and compression of layers into a kind of claustrophobic narco-funk, at times recalling the queasy, wheezing rhythms and beats of Tricky "Rome", "Mobile Home" and "Snaid" provide a particularly compulsive trio of successive tracks along this line, though each one is sufficiently unlike its predecessor to maintain a certain evasiveness in the overall impression left by this album

Village Of Savoonga are similarly hard to pin down (appropriately, as they are connected to Germany's shadowy Kollaps label) and are as willing to indulge in the wilful collision of contrasting sounds, but unlike Tarwater their scratchy surface textures don't appear to offer much in the way of resolution Percussion more often than not here competes on the same level as everything else, its waywardness undermining any possible anchoring effects There is a constant, even bassline throughout the second track, "Score", combined with relentless piston-beats, but this is disfigured by sudden unruly bursts of percussion and strident noise, substituting rhythmic logic for nervous unpredictability Its upper-case counterpart, "SCORE", emits further Industrial-strength ambience, but with a more cohesive hint. "Above Our Heads" also achieves a certain unity of purpose towards its close but lacks the propulsive qualities of Tarwater Village Of Savoonga display an admirably experimental edginess without being able to quite make things hang together convincingly

TOM RIDGE

Tenore De Orosei

Amore Profundhu (Voches De Sardinna 1)

WINTER & WINTER 910021 CD

Cuncordu De Orosei

Miserere (Voches De Sardinna 2)

WINTER & WINTER 910022 CD

The choral music of Sardinia offers a fascinating glimpse back into history, a possible direct line to musical practices long lost in other parts of Europe At the same time it feels very specific to its locality, a dialect of music preserved in a long-isolated corner of the Mediterranean Here are two male voice choirs from the tiny town of Orosei on the east coast of Sardinia, two quartets which have refined the local tradition with the same attention to timbre and detail expected from internationally celebrated groups like The Hilliard Ensemble

Timbre is everything in this music — every chord glows with resonance like a stained glass window in sunlight. "A Una Rosa" on the first album is a demonstration of the precision with which this monolithic sound is constructed, the sheer bristling excitement that can be generated by four grained voices interlocking This is world-class harmony singing *Amore Profundhu* has the more cheerful material, hymns of love and dance songs, driven to accelerate by yelping attacks The fierce bass voice of Mario Siotto is crucial to the sound, exploring rasping caverns of the larynx normally only visited by Mongolians and Tibetans

But the *Miserere* album is somehow even more powerful Hard to believe that this is only a quartet, the vocal texture is so rich The music is from religious processions, some of them pictured in the booklet, plus settings of liturgical texts like "Stabat Mater" and the Magnificat. A couple of episodes of clanging

metal and clashing sticks again recall Tibetan rituals. Even with little understanding of the dialect texts, this is deeply emotional music. The outrageous slithering chord shifts on "Miserere" make you want to stand up and cheer, and "Tzeleste Tesoro" reduces me to tears every time I hear it.

These stunning performances were recorded in a Sardinian cathedral with great skill by engineer Adrian Von Ripka. All the vocal detail is clear and perfectly positioned in the big acoustic. They even come classily packaged in corrugated cardboard, the Munich-based Winter & Winter label have done us proud.

CLIVE BELL

Rafael Toral
Wave Field

DEXTER'S CIGAR DEX14 CD

No Noise Reduction
No Noise Reduction

ANANANA NNN1 CD

Rafael Toral
Chasing Sonic Booms

ECSTATIC PEACE! 33 CD

These three very different CDs signal the international emergence of Portuguese guitarist, composer and toy abuser Rafael Toral. *Wave Field* was originally released in 1995 and is here reissued on Jim O'Rourke's Dexter's Cigar label. On the face of it, it's not promising. Toral's own sleevenote describes his music as being "located in a far away region of the Ambient territory, close to the frontier with a swampy area where abstract vibrations from liquid rock are solved under noise-charged clouds echoing some electrical irradiation." He means timbre-is-all guitar drone stuff, right? Well, no. Toral takes the body vibrations from an electric guitar and passes them through a series of filters, EQs and delays to create shimmering, open-ended textures. In places his technique recalls early Thomas Köner, but its sense of suspended time and its gorgeous harmonies are closer to Eno's *Thursday Afternoon*.

No Noise Reduction is the group Toral co-fronts with fellow Portuguese Paulo Feliciano. Drawn from three radio broadcasts, NNR's music couldn't be further removed from the ambience of *Wave Field*. They take the guts out of cheap 'n' noisy electric toys, tinker with their circuitry and then feed the resulting noise down an analogue FX chain linking phasers, tape echo, etc. What comes out the other end emerges from the two inch speaker of a toy Marshall amp. The whole process is then mirrored on guitar. Think of the Clangers soundtrack performed by a precocious ten year old let loose in IRCAM and you might get some idea of its sonic attraction.

Chasing Sonic Booms is a collection of live improvisations with various partners, recorded over the last four years. It never quite approaches the laboratory peculiarities of the NNR set, nor the serene beauty of *Wave Field*. The two best pieces are duets with Jim O'Rourke on accordion and electronics. They're wonderful pieces, full of nervous tension which occasionally bursts into outright violence. Elsewhere, Toral plays solo and with violinist Jane Henry, prepared guitar loop specialist Manuel Mota, and accordionist Waldo Riedl. Each collaboration reveals a different facet of a highly imaginative musician.

SIMON HOPKINS

Ui
Lifelike

SOUTHERN RECORDS 18547 CD

Given that Ui spent a year and a half recording and mixing *Lifelike*, and that many of the compositions stem from quite different projects — "Lacerta" includes material from *Wire* contributor Sasha Frere-Jones's previous group, Dolores, other tracks include fallout from recent collaborations with Luke Vibert and Techno Animal — this is a surprisingly fluent, coherent and self-contained album. Like 96's *Sidelong*, *Lifelike* is a bass-led set of throbbing instrumentals, but where the former concentrated on the dual electric bass work of Frere-Jones and Wilbo Wright — making for a punchy, strident, prowling sound — *Lifelike* is more understated and reflective. The sound is still full of body, but the grooves roll more seamlessly, with lighter guitar sounds generally substituting for the second bass. The spaciousness and evenness of the tone suggest they've drifted closer to Tortoise territory, and yet there's still a warm, powerful ballast here, funky at times, and a dub-like penchant for pairing the low melodic drive with sketchier treble sounds on harmonica, guitar or synth.

The beat is regularly a motorik kickdrum, but there's nothing machinic about Ui's grooves. Synthesizers supply barely intrusive flecks of background colour, there's touches of brass and a cornet solo. "Lacerta" provides slow lucid guitar lines, staccato radiation crackle, clockwork beats, and bass strings that purr and growl, while the final "Exeunt" sounds like a post-tonal Julee Cruise: reverberative, angular and shimmering.

If there are any touchstones for this mix of warm and cool it's probably 90s HipHop. The drumming is sharp but the riffs are kept plain, with slight tremolo or vibrato effects to add body and colour. But this is a smooth drive, with all the shocks absorbed to leave a sense of effortless suspension — just the strong flowing bass sounds, urban, uncluttered, unhurried, cooly atmospheric. It would make great soundtrack music. It won't fully impinge on your life, but there's an unconscious groundswell that carries you with it, as it grooves through the air, making the emptiness seem purposeful and contained. Coolly sprung, detached but sensuous, like some of Tortoise's work, you might feel only half engaged, but sometimes that's enough.

MATT FFYTCHE

Various Artists
Closed On Account Of Rabies

MERCURY 536480 CD

"Everything leads to Poe," claimed Allen Ginsberg, one of the brains behind this compilation of interpretations of the poems and stories of Edgar Allan. A curious claim perhaps for an author who is often consigned to a decommissioned tradition of frock coated romanticism, an aspect of his work represented here by Jeff Buckley's beautiful recording of "Ulalume". The clarity and innocence of Buckley's voice is given extra resonance by the dark blues pulse which beats beneath it, and the singer's tragic death soon after.

But at its best Poe's work essentially represents a fracture with the past. His use of contemporary ghostly cliches like castles and thunderstorms may seem a little creaky, but his landscapes are always primarily a representation of his character's tortured imaginations. "My terror is not of Germany, but of the soul," he wrote as a retort to critics who saw him as yet another Gothic hack.

In fact Poe's studies of madness and obsession are a precursor to the science of psychoanalysis. Small wonder that his symbolism became such a fecund source of material for early Freudians, such as Marie Bonaparte, who had a field day with the fixation the narrator has on the teeth of the eponymous epileptic heroine of "Berenice", which is recounted here by Dr John, with snatches of a beautifully restrained backing arranged by Marc Ribot which perhaps makes it the most successfully executed track.

In place of more worldly motivations for evil, Poe's sardonic and egocentric anti-heroes are driven by a motive of "perverseness", a desire to disobey the natural instincts not merely of right and wrong, but of reason.

"Of this spirit, philosophy takes no account, phrenology finds no place for it among its organs," as it is described in "The Black Cat", here teased by Diamanda Galás's slow, blackly luxurious exploration of its sibilance, drawing out the violent and erotic nuances typical of Poe's work, and which the surrealist Andre Breton, one of many leftfield French admirers, characterised as "convulsive beauty".

On the minus side there is an often gratuitous and inappropriate use of background sound. Christopher Walken's oddly formal and yet supremely edgy reading of "The Raven" has some of its power dissipated by an overdubbed excess of reverb and electric guitar doodling. Similarly "The Tell Tale Heart"'s keyboard scales are a little bit Scooby Doo, but Iggy Pop's folksy drawl through the story is surprisingly effective — a kind of satanic James Stewart.

The odd howler aside — the dimwitted, lumbering pub rock backing The Fugs' Ed Sanders gives to "The Haunted Palace" — this is a rich and imaginative exploration of the many relevances of a fascinating and tragic artist. Somewhere, somehow, the Raven raves on.

MIKE SHALLCROSS



in brief avant rock

Reviewed by **David Keenan**

a-Band Legendary First a-Band CD NO LABEL CD

The Shadow Ring Hold Onto ID SILTBREEZE SB75 CD

At last a semi-available CD by the legendary (at least among those who care about these things) a-Band, Neil Campbell's group of idiot-avants Recorded live to two-track at the Canning Factory in Nottingham 1991, this is an early, great freedom belch from the UK underground, featuring a cast well into double figures, among them the likes of Jim Plaistow, Richard Youngs and Stream Angel Toy instruments, kazoo, acoustic guitar and recorders, coupled with exercises in group breathing and chanting, hit the spot so satisfyingly that at times you could believe it's the Ghost LP that Incus never released

I've always been pretty suspicious of The Shadow Ring, who seem so preconceived and passionless, they might well have singlehandedly invented the bedroom Improv-geek loser genre *Hold Onto ID*'s centrefold doesn't help matters any The three Rings are portrayed drug-slouched and proudly dressed by their mothers, as if they're begging to be labelled dysfunctional or strange Yet, against all expectations, they've produced a compulsive brew of detuned guitars, kiddie squeak voices and deadpan tales of Home County horror, shot through with some nicely overloaded electronics Irritatingly addictive listening

Bedhead Transaction De Novo TRANCE SYNDICATE TR67 CD

Sue Garner To Run More Smoothly CITY SLANG EFA 08708 CD

Granted, Slint's *Spiderland* was a very wonderful album, but come on, you guys have got to let these things go Very much Jacob Dylan to Slint's Papa Bob, Bedhead play an uptight, note perfect take on the Slint legacy Except they're cheesier, which I suppose counts as putting a new spin on the Slint coffin

Sue Garner is currently a member of Run On alongside the ubiquitous Alan Licht. She's also served time in the likes of Fish & Roses and The Shams but here she treads a perilous Country/singer-songwriter path with some guidance from former dbs man Chris Stamey The hick gulps and big throated gurgles of her voice (especially on the cover of Merle Haggard's "Silver Wings") leaves her sounding not a million miles from US Saucer's spooked vocalist Margaret Murray, but the rest of her group fail to come up with anything as sonically interesting A wasted opportunity

Warren Cuccurullo Thanks 2 Frank IMAGO 7278723002 CD

Warren Cuccurullo Machine Language IMAGO IMA24001 CD

Warren is a stripped-to-the-waist meathead who, in between worshipping Frank Zappa and oiling his pecs, likes to play sub-symphonic dweeb guitar like Steve Vai or some such His bid to become the first Improv 'chick magnet' is entirely admirable but, I feel, ultimately doomed to failure Both these hilarious albums, complete with titles like "Ass Man", suck as bad as Zappa's satirical jabs in the same erogenous zones Really, Warren has to be both seen and heard to be believed

Ectogram Spitsbergen OCHRE OCH019 10"

Family Of God Family Of God OCHRE OCH004L CD

From Wales, Ectogram have released a handful of singles and a double LP *I Can't Believe It's Not Reggae* to a resolutely unmoved public. Once again, it's the public's loss, as Ectogram chase a particularly pure and intangible sound, equal parts Canterbury sundown jamming, communal Amon Duül clatter and slightly spaced folk rock. "Spitsbergen" is a monster, an eternally repeating, lazily locked groove with inaudible mumbled vocals and the occasional piano chord going nowhere slowly

Family Of God share a similar Canterbury vibration "Goodnight Piccadilly" sounds like an out-take from Kevin Ayers's *Joy Of A Toy* This is as genuinely skewed and interesting as ersatz big production pop gets these days A beautiful package, well worth investigating

Don Fleming Jojo ASS RUNne GOD BLESS RECORDS NOIRCD006 CD

Nicholas Fuller The Centres NO LABEL CD

Surely the Don Fleming CD was originally destined to be released on, but then shelved by, Byron Coley/Thurston Moore's ultra limited Ass Run series (why else the dumb ass title?) The album is all cheesily overblown Teutonic organ, mangled telephone messages (from Richard Hell, among others — impressive, huh?) and face-achingly wrought guitar tributes to the likes of Cheap Trick.

Nicholas Fuller's got himself a CD-R (recordable CD machine), so he can now press up limited runs of his lazily mechanistic improvised guitar hammering just because he has the technology That's vanity publishing for you What with Musica Transonic's Makoto Kawabata also starting up a limited run CD-R label, the sheer proliferation of commercially available outsider music is going be phenomenal

Frontier Frontier EMPEROR JONES/TRANCE SYNDICATE EJ17 CD

Longstone Surrounded By Glass OCHRE OCH005L CD

Recording for former Butthole Surfer King Coffey's label, Frontier aporopriately manipulate subliminal mind-altering electronics in a brutally transcendental fashion not heard since pre-beats Panasonic

Longstone take off from similar starting points, only to set all sorts of alarm bells ringing with a series of tone pieces so becalmed they could almost be 'therapeutic' Don't let that put you off, though

Godheadsilo Share The Fantasy SUB POP SPCD416 CD

Starfuckers Infrantumi DRUNKEN FISH DFR42 CD

Godheadsilo are a pair of dumb, beered up American college geeks so hung up on the current (non-)cultural status of Metal that they can only approach it with their tongues waggling and their eyes firmly crossed Stripped to just drums and bass, they play over the top comedy Metal and even cover Phil Collins, probably while wearing traffic cones on their heads (what have you started, Buckethead?) Anyone genuinely interested in this last bastion of sonic integrity is advised to stay well clear

Instead, check out Italian group Starfuckers, an altogether more puzzling proposition, projecting rimshots and occasional muffled guitar, plus Blixa Bargeld-like whispered vocals, into a singular exhumation of Industrial space Hard to articulate the heady sense of otherness this release radiates, but highly recommended nonetheless.

Pelt Techeod VHF VHF36 CD

RhBand Paris No Gesso GYTTJA 00ZE01D 10"

Within the space of two more than decent releases (a limited vinyl pressing called *Snake To Snake* on Klang Industries and their previous VHF disc *Max Meadows*), US group Pelt have been virtually alone in wrestling with the implications of post-Fushitsusha molten rock flow Their favourite strategies include endlessly accumulating, gravity-defying feedback and sudden, stabbing downstrokes. On this new disc, they double the dose by leaning their guitars on amps while taking up the tablas. There's a real weighty inertia hanging over the three tracks, marked by a determination to do nothing, go nowhere "New Delhi Blues" is a bongload of mystic corn and modal trance that'd put Sun City Girls to shame, and the rest firmly belongs to the guitar school that believes in capturing every last heartbeat of a dying amp for posterity Good enough, but after the last two discs it should've been, well nuttier

RhBand's 10" is even better than their Drunken Fish CD of last year, featuring the kind of electronic collisions on a planetary scale that Tangerine Dream's Edgar Froese would have had wet dreams over in his pre-mullet head heyday Nice package, too

Total Buffin' The Celestial Muffin RURAL ELECTRIFICATION PROGRAM REP001 CD

Total Eternity's Beautiful Frontispiece VHF VHF34 CD

Skullflower guitarist Matthew Bower's monomaniacal pursuit of the nowhere zone continues apace with this fine pair of high-ended pot and pipe rattlers The *Buffin'* CD (on Bower's own newly activated Rural Electrification label) is chock full of Terry Riley-like, helium bloated reedpipes made blurred and beautiful by sheets of feedback. It also collects some choice examples of Bower's more claustrophobic pieces recorded between 1994-96 *Eternity's Beautiful Frontispiece*, on the other hand, is more skybound, with some solidly rung acoustic guitar lending the feedback an air of elemental calm.

Various Artists Foxtrot CHALICE GRAALCD001 CD

All proceeds from the sale of the Foxtrot compilation go to Coil's John Balance, in an attempt to offset the costs of his treatment for alcoholism — and what a stellar line-up it is. Current 93 contribute the beautiful, ghost-lit "A Dream Of The Inmost Light (For Christoph Heemann)" The track's credits list Lost Children as "howling endlessly", and they're not kidding Coil's Peter Christopherson chips in with a vaguely Eastern-scented march, and Coil drop two heavily processed and deeply affecting paeans to alcohol Nurse With Wound lift a chunk from Radio 3's *Mixing It* with the presenters puzzling over the identity of NWW, the best they can come up with being such cringe-inducing, inadequate descriptions as "think jazz, think punk attitude" Great stuff But the disc highlight must be The Inflatable Sideshow, a guitar/drums/bass trio consisting of Steve Stapleton, Peat Bog and Daragh Grealy, which sounds like it could be an out-take from Nurse's long rumoured Guru Guru-styled power trio sessions.

Vas Deferens Organization Sweat Your Cheeses But Not In My Salad CHARNEL MUSIC CHCD29 CD

Vas Deferens Organization, who hail from Dallas, are obviously big Nurse With Wound fans Indeed, this CD even comes complete with their own version of the mythic Nurse list of inspirations. Theirs includes both Nurse and Current 93 alongside the likes of Haino, Dantalion's Chanot and Loch Ness Inevitably, the sonics within don't quite match their aspirations, but when they periodically slide back the irksome electronic noise comedy glossing the music, it's a pretty good place to go boil your head □

in brief classical

Reviewed by **Andy Hamilton**

Thomas Adès Living Toys EMI 724357227124 CD

Various Artists Striking A Balance: Contemporary Percussion Music EMI 724357226721 CD

Two from EMI's Debut series for young artists and composers. Thomas Adès, at 26, has been acclaimed a prodigy. The hype is justified. His second disc for the label is more extrovert. Adès creates intense melodies and scrunchy harmonies. The 20 minute *Living Toys*, performed by The London Sinfonietta, looks to be heading for a dying fall but concludes with some shockingly loud eruptions. *Arcadiana*, played here by The Endellion Quartet, is Adès's first string quartet. Its evanescent moods and darting invention create an unforgettable impact. A great talent.

Contemporary Percussion Music is a misleading subtitle for *Striking A Balance* — almost all the percussion is either marimba or vibraphone. There are pleasant enough arrangements of Ravel and Bach, and sparkling musings on Paganini by Toshi Ichiyanagi. Chick Corea's pretty "Children's Songs" gets yet another crossover airing, and Richard Michael's "Jazz Suite" is very well, pleasant. Nothing goes on too long to irritate, or long enough to enthral. Monochrome and lightweight.

Hermann Bühler Earth Bound FOR 4 EARS RECORDS 825 CD

Bühler was going to write a piece based on the unintelligible route map of the Los Angeles bus system, he says, but he wrote *Earth Bound* instead. Voice and percussion improvise in collaboration with live electronics (Bühler himself). Singer Bonnie Barnett certainly has an amazing voice, sounding at times like a pig squealing — if that *is* her. As the piece develops, Fredy Studer's drumming takes on a jazz beat, then becomes freer. At around 30 minutes, *Earth Bound* doesn't outlive its welcome. Strangely compelling and very strange.

Corrado Canonici Contrabass CAPSTONE RECORDS CPS2868 CD

I guess *Contrabass* is the title of the album, and it's also Canonici's instrument. The most substantial piece is by Romanian composer Dinu Ghezzo — the exuberant *Five Corrado Songs* for bass and interactive computer. Don't get too excited about the world premiere recording by Italian maestro Luciano Berio — *Psy* for solo bass is only 100 seconds long. More familiar fare nowadays is Scelsi's *Maknongan* for singing bassist, and Cage's *Music For Two*, with Canonici joined by Guido Arbonelli on clarinet. Carrado is a phenomenal bass player, and this mostly solo album consistently holds the interest.

Peter Hansen Trajectories SLASK 015 CD

Steve Peters Emanations DO DISCS 0034 CD

"I cannot afford any aesthetics," says composer Peter Hansen, as he sits down at the piano. Well, aesthetics don't come cheap — they can seriously compromise your commercial potential. But I guess that's not what Hansen means (is there a problem in the translation from Swedish?). Maybe he's thinking of Morton Feldman's dictum "Let the sounds be themselves". The three pieces here are for vibraphone, with Javanese gongs added on the second. The vibes don't seem to be damped at all, and the music is slow moving and quite simple. The sleevenote namechecks Feldman and Eno. Hansen's music *is* minimal, but not beautifully crafted like Feldman, who after all was very aesthetic in the way he got sounds to appear from and disappear into nowhere. But the result still captivates.

Shades of LaMonte Young and Marian Zazeela in Steve Peters's work, but feedback rather than just intonation is the concept. *Emanations* was originally designed as a sound installation for Claire Giovanniello's *White Paintings Wrapped In Gauze* and *Rods Driven Into Gallery Walls*. Peters wanted an "ethereal sonic presence existing on the boundary between sound and air". Resonant frequencies of the room were filtered via microphone feedback. There's an austere beauty about the result, intended to be heard at very low volume over long periods. Set the repeat function of your CD player and switch on that drone state of mind.

Bruno Moreigne Bruits, Sons, Paroles Et Silences De La Forêt KADN/AGLAC CD

Noises, sounds, words and silences of the forest which have captivated Bruno Moreigne since early childhood. Working out his inspiration is a headache in more ways than one — the text, in French, winds its way in irregular concentric circles on the sleeve. But the gist is that the sounds of the Forêt de Chabrière have been treated and distorted electronically in a contemporary form of *musique concrète*. The emphasis is on organised treatment of the sounds, and bird, animal and insect noises, rain and gales, accompany eerie soundscapes and repetitive rhythms. A delightful evocation.

Michael Nyman Gattaca OST VIRGIN AMERICA 724384501822 CD

The Original Motion Picture Soundtrack to the Sci-fi thriller with Ethan Hawke and Uma Thurman. It's Nyman's first Hollywood assignment, and he describes working with The Los Angeles Film Orchestra as "appealing and seductive". The result, which dispenses with the trademark motoric rhythms, is lush and appealing, if not seductive, but will offer few surprises for Nyman's fans or detractors. His recent EMI *Concertos* disc was more substantial.

Sarah Peebles Suspended In Amber INNOVA 506 CD

The sound of the sho, a Japanese mouth organ with bamboo pipes, has been described as "like a butterfly suspended in amber", and it inspired much of the music on this recording. Toronto based composer Sarah Peebles studied gagaku and other traditional music in Japan. More recently she has combined acoustic Japanese instruments with natural soundscapes and sampling. "Tomoé" is the longest track here, an "improvisational tableau" for shô, percussion, electronics and sampled sound. The haunting sound of the shô drifts around samples of Buddhist chant, prayer bells, insect noises and running water. "Phoenix Calling" is for shô and bugaku percussion ensemble, while "Aqua Bubble" features ondes martenot and electroacoustics. Slow moving and enchanting.

Krzysztof Penderecki/Béla Bartók Violin Concerto No 2 (Metamorphosen)/Sonata For Violin & Piano No 2 DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON DG 453507 CD

Hans Werner Henze Symphony No 9 EMI 724355651327 CD

Latest offerings from two eagles of post-war modernism. In the 70s, Penderecki, leader of the Polish avant garde, turned conservative and pre-dated Boy George with his New Romanticism. "Pages from the Symphony Writer's Handbook, chapters on Bruckner and Mahler" was one critic's unfavourable response. Now he's synthesising the synthesis, producing neo-Romantic works leavened by avant garde gestures. Leading virtuoso Anne-Sophie Mutter is the dedicatee and soloist here. The result is both bombastic and anachronistic, but curiously appealing.

Henze, born in 1926, is one of the most prolific and stimulating of post-war German composers. His wartime experience has increasingly dominated his artistic life, especially since a move to Italy in the 50s, and he has developed a loathing of the German fatherland. The ninth symphony sums up that reaction — it "portrays an apotheosis of terror and grief" yet it's also a tribute to the resistance to Hitler. On the model of Beethoven — Henze is no wallflower — he makes his ninth a choral symphony. Searing and bombastic as Penderecki, Henze pulls out all the stops — literally, when the organ appears. But though his heart's in the right place I'm not convinced by the music.

William Grant Still/Olly Wilson Afro-American Symphony/Expansions III CENTAUR CRC2331 CD

It's impossible to do justice here to the poignant case of William Grant Still (1895-1978). He's famous as the first African-American composer to have a symphony — his first, called *Afro-American Symphony* (1930) — performed by a major American orchestra. This new recording is by The Cincinnati Philharmonic. Still learned arranging skills with 'inventor of the blues' WC Handy, and studied with Varèse. But the modernist influence didn't endure, and he turned to the blues for inspiration in a series of symphonies. The lyrical and unpretentious *Afro-American Symphony* seems stuck in a timewarp, with flashes of Gershwin but more often — would you believe — Dvorak. Olly Wilson, born 1937, *is* a modernist and on the evidence of the 13 minute "Expansions III", a more interesting composer.

John Tavener The Whale APPLE/EMI SAPCOR 15/077779849727 CD

Apart from Greek Orthodox icons, John Tavener has been associated with mega icons of the 60s and 90s. *The Whale* — about Jonah's adventures in it — was the work that launched his career, and the London Sinfonietta made its first appearance in 1968 with the premiere of this dramatic so-called cantata. But despite *The Whale*'s great success, no major label showed an interest until John Lennon invited Tavener to join Apple. Their famous recording, with the Sinfonietta, has finally been reissued on its original label. The style, extravagant and dissonant, is a complete contrast to Tavener's later spiritual Minimalism. His next serious bout of popularity came nearly 30 years later when his music was played at Princess Diana's funeral.

Various Artists Cantus Estonian Chamber Music From The 1990s FINLANDIA 3984214352 CD

With the success of the Munich-based Estonian Contemporary Music label (ECM) with Arvo Pärt, others are cashing in on Estonian chic. But with a population less than Scotland's, a huge depth of talent isn't likely (Veljo Tormis is, I reckon, the only serious rival to Pärt). Erkki-Sven Tuür has been heavily promoted, and he's the most interesting figure on this compilation of unknown, yet mostly worthy Estonians. His "Spiel" for cello and guitar stands out in a pleasant but rather bland programme □

in brief critical beats

Reviewed by **Peter Shapiro**

Zend Avesta Queen Of Siam EP ARTEFACT ART9 12"
With a title like "Karlheinz Stockhausen Was The Funky Drummer", you probably know where this is coming from Superbly crafted Dark Ambient deftly juxtaposed with Junglist nuances and a hint of collapsing tonality make "Stockhausen" the track to look out for, but the deconstructed drum 'n' bass of the title track is worthwhile as well

Foul Play Productions Synthetic Bitch/Golden Gate PARTISAN PART007 12"
After the tragic death of Steve Bradshaw, Foul Play return with a new line-up and a new name, but the same old quality "Synthetic Bitch" is a brilliant rapprochement between contemporary dystopian visions and a time when the "Think" break wasn't such a pariah to drum 'n' bass producers "Golden Gate" attempts to update Lalo Schifrin-style movie themes for Junglist action heroes and succeeds admirably in getting the balance right between funk and tension

High Lonesome Sound System Champion Sound EXIST DANCE E0017 2x12"
Overloaded dancefloor monster from LA I don't think they can possibly squeeze any more detail into "Champion Sound" there are a couple of breakbeats rumbling around, an Acid bassline, a human beatbox, some dancehall toasting, a processed Middle Eastern voice and instrumental flourish, a dub bassline, some TR-808 handclaps and a few hiccoughing squiggles for good measure if that's not enough for you, check the DJ H-Bomb mix which features a taste of "Dance To The Drummer's Beat", some Public Enemy guitar noise, a little Mikey Dread, some hi-pitch scratches, a whisper of Chakacha's "Jungle Fever" and vocal samples that speak in tongues Then there's Tom Chasteen's parched ethno-Ambient dub which isn't too purist to include a car crash and some spooky *Plan 9 From Outer Space* sounds But wait, there's more The second 12" has fine, if a bit restrained, mixes from Tranquility Bass and DJ Z-Trip (of *Return Of The DJ* fame) More is definitely more

Il's & Solo Frozen/Point Eight TIMELESS OJ029 12"
The drum 'n' bass cult of the engineer continues unabated with the recent apotheosis of gearheads like Dom & Roland, Optical and Matrix. While their supposed filtering innovations and meticulous construction aesthetic usually seems to impress only fellow musos, on his remix of Il's & Solo's "Frozen", Dom manages to slightly tweak and bring something new to the "Amen" break while retaining its splintered funk feel "Point B" avoids the dull rigidity of two-step by virtue of, paradoxically, a fab two note bassline

The Lovely Genette Dreadnought EP SOUNDCLASH SOUND10 12"
This long overdue follow-up to the rather wonderful "Gasoline" isn't too dissimilar to Memphis Minnie, DJ Vadim and Squarepusher singing spirituals together on the same Mississippi chain gang A severely depressed Marvin Gaye singing "Trouble Man", chitterling beats and a gospel congregation once again show the symbiotic affinity that the blues and downtempo beats have with each other

Miss Kittin & The Hacker Champagne! EP INTERNATIONAL DEEJAY GIGOLOS GIGOLO11 12"
Like Motowners Le Car, these French sophistos have frozen the Earth's rotation at some point in 1982, when synth pop ruled the world and Cabaret Voltaire were still good In fact, they rip off CV on the camp dystopian shenanigans of "The Grey Area", there are references to Visage and New Order on "1982" and "Franck Sinatra" is Berlin's "Sex" remade for people who think The Magnetic Fields' Stephen Merritt isn't arch enough A pose is a pose is a pose

Papa Blue En Velo PUU PUU11 12"
Cheekily encased in shrink wrap and a cover not altogether different from some of those Pablo Live albums, this release from Sähkö subsidiary Puu represents the inimitably Finnish take on retrograde jazz fetishism Slower than slow tempos and death knell synth patterns just hang in the air like oppressive humidity — even a bit of scratching and a House remix can't liven things up Bleaker than a really depressing Aki Kaurismaki film

Photon Inc Everybody Freedom STRICTLY RHYTHM SR12S27 12"
God knows how long this has been lying around, but with all the hype about Chain Reaction it seems only right to give a shout out to the style's ancestor, DJ Pierre's Wild Pitch sound Here, in his Photon Inc guise, Pierre, who is the inheritor of Walter Gibbons's mantle as the don of disco dubcats, updates the filters and phasing sound of Wild Pitch for the disco cut-up era of House

Pilgrim DIE EP FLO RECORDS FLO004 12"
With scratching that sounds like Kerry King's solo on Slayer's "Angel Of Death", the chainsaw grind of its rhythm and the stabbing strings, the *DIE* EP is breakbeat for connoisseurs of Dario Argento and The Misfits — 'splatterbreak' that lives up to its name it's messier than the Dirty Protest, but it's got enough aggro to keep this barely reconstructed Metal head from reaching for his Napalm Death records

Ian Pooley Loopduelle FORCE INC FIM133 12"
The title says it all really "Loopduelle" is little more than an intense loop stretched out over two sides of a 12" so that it's barely distinguishable from a locked groove in its mesmerising qualities The sound is not all that different from Basic Channel, albeit with funkier percussion, but its almost brutal relentlessness brings it closer in spirit to a B-side by The Normal

Prisoners Of Technology Crazzy/Cold Blooded FRESH KUTT FK06 12"
Jungle Brothers Jungle Brother GEE STREET GEES000496 12"
Gravediggaz Unexplained GEE STREET GEE5001626 12"
Junglist percussion may be getting duller by the second, but as long as the bass remains king there's still some life in the old codger The filtered bassline on Prisoners Of Technology's "Cold Blooded (Pay Up Mix)" manages to outquake Aphrodite and Mickey Finn — the undisputed masters of sphincter loosening Aphrodite and Finn's re-released mix of "Jungle Brother" is virtually indistinguishable from Aphrodite's "King Of The Beats" or "Listen To The Rhythm Flow", but when did that ever stop anyone from getting busy? Aphrodite protegés Natural Born Chillers spread the bass out on their mix of The Gravediggaz' "Unexplained", making it less kinetic, but even more of a body blow

Tee-Bone & Leon Marr Rezurrection/Passing Phases CREATIVE WRKZ CREW001 12"
It sure is nice to hear breakbeats again Tee-Bone's "Rezurrection" is taut and tense drum 'n' bass like the Zend Avesta EP above, but a bit more moodily stagnant with its fatigued bassline dragging along like a schoolboy's unwanted coat with the hardstep break. Leon Marr's "Passing Phases" achieves a similar feat with jazzy drum 'n' bass by pulling it apart in a manner that matches the scattered dynamics of the beats

Vodershow Vodershow EP1 EVOL URBAIN EVURB001 12"
As you would surmise of any record with a guest appearance from Panasonic, the *Vodershow* EP eschews the retro-Electro kitsch of most of its fellow travellers in favour of clipped dynamics, warped off-kilter dub manoeuvres and a textural palette that owes as much to Suicide as it does to Afrika Bambaataa Actually, the best Electro reference might be the intro to Reggie Griffin's "Mirda Rock" stretched out and turned into a Scientist record

Saul Williams Elohim (1972) BIG DADA BD06 12"
Probably because "the wackness is spreading like the plague" among rappers, it seems like we're in the middle of another one of those periodic renaissances of black beat poetry *a la* Last Poets and Dana Bryant The star of last year's scene-defining comp, *Eargasms*, Saul Williams drops his first EP for Ninja Tune offshoot, Big Dada Williams is obviously clever and has the gift of the gab, but what really makes this EP work is the music Junglist touches, emotive downtempo beats and moving minor key strings never let "Elohim" or "Twice The First Time" drown in the steady stream of Williams's word play

The Wiseguys Ooh La La WALL OF SOUND WALLT/D038 12"
Stealing a catchphrase from a rapper stealing a catchphrase from an old designer jeans advert, borrowing some wink-wink-nudge-nudge 60s teenbeat from Bentley Rhythm Ace, and pilfering a snatch of driving flute funk, "Ooh La La" is an absolutely undeniable distillation of the past couple of years' worth of student dancefloor fillers It's similar to, but way better than, The All Seeing I's rather obvious "The Beat Goes On" The flip, "Expand On The Topic", sounds a lot like Main Source circa 1991, which sounded pretty great back then and hasn't dated too badly

X-ecutioners Raida's Theme ASPHODEL 0111 CD/12"
I was disappointed when The X-ecutioners' *X-pressions* album came out on Asphodel in last year (just too smooth), but the singles continue to surprise and make the album sound better and better Hardcore turntablism is catered for by "The Countdown" which becomes rather mind boggling when you realise what Rob Swift, Roc Raida and the rest of the former X-men are doing Straight up HipHop fiends will find plenty of pleasure in the remix of "Raida's Theme" □

in brief electronica

Reviewed by **Rob Young**

The Completion Electronic Music For The Cinema CREATION CRECO233 CO

Komputer The World Of Tomorrow MUTE CDSTUMM162 CD

The grandaddy of it all, Stocky, diagnosed it as 'synthi-fou', which means synth madness, and we need to be prepared to fight off these future-retro-Bacofoil Radiophonik imitators by any means necessary. Not content with continually stirring the Goat's Head Soup with Super Ape Bobby Gillespie in Primal Scream, guitarist Andrew Innes has delivered this 'secret' electronic project in the wake of the supremely canny Add N To X. At least he does it in private.

Komputer's texture-perfect facsimile of *Model*-era Kraftwerk, complete with minor-key arpeggiations and blank vox, seems as oxymoronic as a CD player mounted in a walnut panelled gramophone housing. And when all they can offer up as a comment on the information revolution is a vocoder repeating the words "Bill Gates" over and over, it just becomes embarrassing.

Cylob Previously Unavailable On Compact Disc REPHLEX CAT055 CD

On the face of it, it was a chalk and cheese marriage: synthesizers twinkling like an Open University theme tune, and distorted, compressed breakbeats broadcast through a Speak 'n' Spell toy. That, at any rate, was the attraction of Chris Jeffs's Kinaesthesia releases for Rephlex, and similar ingredients were being used at the same time by Mike Paradinas on his contemporaneous debut *Tango 'N' Vectif*. Somewhere between 1993 and 95, Jeffs changed his name to Cylob, and that's the handle this CD is going under, even though Kinesthesia tracks account for the larger fraction. If you've found previous Cylob work a bit sugar-free, these nutty clusters might change your mind. "Kobal" and "Plouth" are prime Detroit routed through Hamingay in the manner of early Aphex, "German"'s frenzied shuffle sounds like it was sampled in a logging factory. But the best tracks are remixes by µ-Ziq, Autechre and da Twin himself.

Decal Lo-Lite ULTRAMACK 006 CD

Decal have a weight of sludge in their rough 'n' ready luggage that suggests they're a former rock group. Resident in Dublin, Decal have a little of the waywardness of Luke Vibert's Plug — though not nearly as fast. The way they loop up smidgins of funk on "Malk", then filter it into a fuzzy mash, King Tubby style, adding their own guitar and basslines over the top, suggests an attitude unconstrained by Rare Groove reverence.

Global Goon Cradle Of History REPHLEX CAT058 CD

Midtempo fun from Johnny Hawke, another enigmatic Rephlex minion who's obviously spent far too many late nights at the joystick. Trademark trax replicate the endless unfolding required of narrative computer games, with the flow occasionally interrupted when a life gets lost. Rephreshing to hear a warm, almost steamy ambience wafting off a Rephlex recording instead of the usual pasty crunch.

Kerosene Teenage Secret CAIPIRINHA MUSIC CAI2010 CD

Sum 1 CAIPIRINHA MUSIC CAI2011 CD

Berlin's Kerosene is one of those names that regularly fuels compilations on labels like Pharma and Mille Plateaux. On *Teenage Secret*, he forgets his own name and smoulders instead of erupting in a chemical flare. With lots of ride cymbals, brush drums and rimshots bustling in the grooves, this comes on all loungey and lite: tease with no substance to back up the hinted-at sleaze. He should leave this sort of thing to Tipsy.

Sum, the New York based duo of Danny Blume (a colleague of We's Olive and Lloop in Liminal) and Chris Kelly, spend a long time coaxing their brand of analogue systems Jungle out of their gear racks, but over-reliance on improvisation leads to too many dead spots. Only on "Holocene" do the valves — and the dynamics — begin to warm up.

Matmos Quasi-Objects VAGUE TERRAIN VAGUE1 CD

With one album title, San Francisco miniaturists Matmos have named the plastic sound totems erected on, well, most of the CDs on this page, in fact. Last year's *Matmos* took everybody by surprise with its contact miked crayfish, and *Quasi-Objects* finds Drew Daniel and MC Schmidt back in the lab, puffing up whoopee cushions, stretching latex T-shirts and doing unspeakable things to the human body. If this all sounds a trifle anorakish on paper, it should be said that there's more wit and invention feeding into "The Purple Island" or the five-string ukulele samples of "The Banjo's Categorical Gut" than any of the currently fashionable Techno squirts. Go for it, if a meeting of The LA Free Music Society and Autechre sounds like a gig to die for.

Super ESP Super ESP HEFTY 02 CD/12"

Skylab Soft EYEQ SOFT1 CD

Skylab Magenta EP EYE Q EYEUK028 CD

Super ESP: what you'll need if you want to read the info on the yucky mono sleeve collage. It's Casey Rice, the Designer and Tortoise sound man, plus Trenchmouth's Damon Locks, plus Buckethead accomplice Brain playing bass on "Everything Seems Prescribed". Despite their occasional 'throw it at the wall and see what sticks' approach to arrangement ("Burn With ESP" folds in some shavings from the soundtrack of *Things To Come*), Rice's eclectic musical taste, bottomless record crates and portable DAT recorder fuse to create beefy, hydra-headed rhythms and hyperspace-jumps into private location recordings. As a Chicago thing, it's preferable to the blander strains of jazz that some of the Tortoise members have been hibernating in recently.

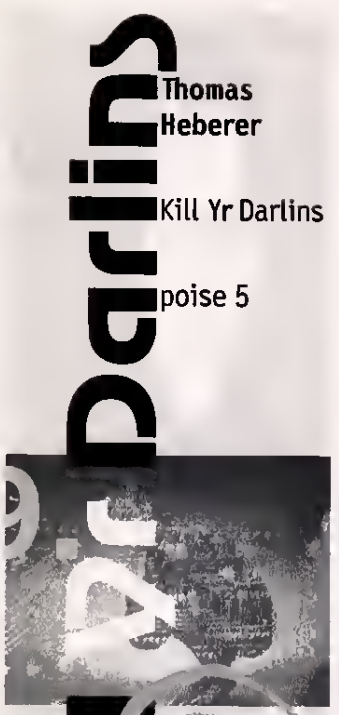
Skylab's Mat Ducasse has much in common with Casey Rice: they like their funk *Maggot Brain* rather than "Good Times", and they're not afraid of the guitar. While it's doubtful Skylab will produce a work as *out* as 94's *#1*, "Soft" proves Ducasse and partner Toshi are still studio wizards, if not true stars (the Todd Rundgren allusion is apt). The colours are saturated, the mood psychedelic, the percussion Oriental, but there's no waffle. In 98, they seem to fancy themselves as the Phil Spectors of Electronica — you may find you can live without the two whiny songs on "Magenta", but then you might appreciate the Steppenwolf riffola of "Bite This!".

Thermal + Freezer + CUE Time Out Of Mind BOXMAN BXCD2 CD

Former Fax label associate Charles Uzzell-Edwards (CUE) is the name you might recognise here, he appears on the third of this triplet of lengthy Ambient Improvs co-ordinated by Joshua Maremont (aka Thermal). The first track, "Tone Ref", I can take or leave, but Maremont's collaboration with Peter Becker, "Ether Leak", produces more to chew on: a fat streak of churning bass that twists through space like a wiggling sonic sandworm, and probing muted trumpet. "71 Scuba — Owl Service", CUE's double act with Thermal, is as rootless and spindrift as the big, arching space voyages he used to record for Peter Namlook. By the time it hit the 15 minute mark, I was itching for some forward thrust.

Voice Stealer The All Electric House SUBVERT VERTCD01 CD

If Komputer learned a thing or two from the deadpan Amish-analogue Techno espoused by US outfits like Le Car, they might end up sounding like Voice Stealer: we still get the odd metallic voice reciting *"technology electromotive force ..."* for no very good reason, but like Drexciya and Ectomorph, Englishman Carl Finlow really does get to the nub of what makes the TR-808, and far older analogue drum synthesizers, tick. □



Dirk Raulf/Frank Schulte
teatime Vol. 1
(poise 1)

Kodexx Sentimental
Das digitale Herz
(poise 2)

Dirk Roulf
Die Welt ist immer wieder schön
(poise 3)

Sotto in Su
Vanitas
(poise 4)

Thomas Heberer
Kill Yr Darlins
(poise 5)

Dirk Roulf/ Fronk Schulte
teatime Vol. 2
(poise 6)



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poise

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in brief jazz reissues

Reviewed by **Barry Witherden**

John Coltrane Living Space
IMPULSE! IMP12462 CD
This CD comprises four tracks ("Living Space", "Untitled 9D314", "Dusk-Dawn" and "Untitled 90320") last available on *The Mastery Of John Coltrane Volume 1*, plus the previously unissued "Last Blues", the master of which was dumped by the record company. Luckily, Alice Coltrane preserved it. In the final years Coltrane's facility and conviction on a plain blues got overlooked, but this shows that, despite his obsession with cosmic exploration, downhome earthiness was still in his repertoire. These tracks date from June 1965, the last sessions before *Ascension*, but there are only occcasional hints of what was to come. Indeed, apart from Coltrane's closing solo, the splendid "90314" would not sound out of place alongside the 1961 Village Vanguard sessions. This is a useful and instructive purchase. And it goes like the clappers.

Tubby Hayes Late Spot At Scott's REDIAL 558183 CD
Tubby Hayes Down In The Village REDIAL 558184 CD
These long overdue reissues launch Verve's Redial series: classic British albums unobtainable for an indecent length of time. Although the mid-60s saw a remarkable flowering of homegrown jazz, when London became the melting pot for talents from such far-flung places as Cape Town, Johannesburg and Tavistock, an earlier generation had already been producing music of a quality to rival most Americans. Before his quintet began recording for Fontana, Tubby Hayes established a formidable reputation with 50s hard bop outfit The Jazz Couriers, sharing the front line with Ronnie Scott. These albums, taped over a couple of 1962 nights at Ronnie's old place, bring back the excitement, freshness and optimism of those days. Hayes is flanked by Jimmy Deucher, Gordon Beck, Freddy Logan and Alan Ganley, who mesh into a streamlined, supercharged unit producing music that deferred to no one in its drive, panache and sheer exhilaration.

Elvin Jones/Jimmy Garrison Sextet Illumination! IMPULSE! IMP12502 CD
With a rhythm section comprising McCoy Tyner, Garrison and Jones, the opening track sounds like The Coltrane Quartet without the prince. Apart from Prince Lasha, that is. Sonny Simmons and Charles Davis also attempt to fill the mighty shoes. Tyner is the best thing about this 1963 session, taking the opportunity to try out some strokes which were no longer feasible in Coltrane's group. Davis also contributes a deal of splendid baritone, saving the front line's honour, despite the occasional hint of sluggish articulation. He throws in some New Thing flurries for dramatic effect, subsuming them into a fluent and coherent style, whereas Lasha and Simmons rarely get beyond trying on Dolphy's clothes. Nevertheless, an entertaining time capsule.

Michel Legrand Et Les Géantes Du Jazz American Legrand Jazz PHILIPS 830074 CD
When the LP was issued in 1959, Phil Woods, Bill Evans and Coltrane were dismissed in the 'etc' at the end of a list of géantes headed by Miles Davis. Miles, Coltrane and Evans only appear on one of three sessions, and their four tracks have cropped up in desultory fashion on various compilations over the years. The programme demonstrates Legrand's accomplished and original arranging ideas, with some surprising angles on classics like "In A Mist" and "Wild Man Blues". His take on "Jitterbug Waltz" must have influenced Dolphy's. This album, among Legrand's finest hours, reminds us how commercial blandishments subverted a substantial jazz talent, and provides stimulating settings for Ben Webster, Donald Byrd, Paul Chambers, Hank Jones and more fine musicians than you could shake a French stick at.

Thelonious Monk Monk In Tokyo COLUMBIA 489771 2CD
The line on Monk's quartet with Charlie Rouse, Frankie Dunlop and (inter)changeable bassists — Butch Warren here — is that it slipped into a routine early on: same old songs, same unvarying succession of tenor, piano, bass and drums, even the same old solos. At the start of this concert from May 1963 it's difficult to gainsay this view. Then the group storms into "Jackie-ing" like they really mean it, waking up the listener and themselves. "Bemsha Swing" follows and Rouse digs in: hardly down 'n' dirty (Rouse was never that gritty) but the signs of life are strong. Monk responds with angular, percussive playing. After a brief, set-closing "Epistrophy" which one wishes had been extended, the buzz carries over to disc two. By now Monk is having fun, taking risky and witty liberties with time and phrasing. The joyful relief continues through "Hackensack", "Blue Monk" (where the leader splatters jagged, warning chords into a pedestrian bass solo that threatens to repnse the somnolence) and a longer "Epistrophy" with Rouse getting frisky, even playing games with reed squeaks. Who'd have thought, 82 minutes ago, that I'd say it, but... recommended.

Music Inc Music Inc & Big Band
CHARLY CDGR227 CD
Music Inc is Charles Tolliver, Stanley Cowell, Cecil McBee and Jimmy Hopps, the big band includes Richard Williams, Virgil Jones, Jimmy Heath, Clifford Jordan, Garnett Brown and Curtis Fuller, so you can happily spend as much time looking at the frame as the picture. Taped in one session in 1970, Cowell and Tolliver's compositions avoid the pitfalls which trapped many big bands at that time. Music Inc sound neither wearisomely old hat nor embarrassingly anxious to be fashionable. Consequently, the music has not dated unduly: there's plenty of sharp, feisty soloing, polished scoring and gutsy section work.

Shakti with John McLaughlin Natural Elements COLUMBIA 489773 CD
A dazzlingly virtuosic blend of jazz, Indian music, rock, mercurial compositions and athletic improvisations, *Natural Elements* still sounds remarkably fresh, transcending its historical location in a way which the heavier, more relentless (and considerably louder) electric Mahavishnu Orchestra does not. Maybe this was down to violinist L Shankar and percussionist Zakir Hussain, grounded in the centuries-old traditions of the most sophisticated of musical genres, substituting for the blunter sensibilities of fusion. Certainly McLaughlin sounds inspired and at ease as he interacts elegantly with their supple, agile lines.

Archie Shepp Live In San Francisco IMPULSE! IMP12542 CD
Archie Shepp Mama Too Tight IMPULSE! IMP12482 CD
At the time, most fans thought Shepp was the major figure, and Pharoah Sanders would fade away as the New Thing became the middle-aged thing and the halo effect of Coltrane's patronage weakened. In the event, Sanders consolidated his experiments into a style with a longer shelf life. After discarding the revolutionary trappings, Shepp retrenched, and his reversion to a more traditional language seemed like the actions of the custodian at a dusty museum rather than a vibrant natural growth from the rich soil of tradition. Over the last 20 years I've felt compelled (and able) to respect his work rather than revel in it, but these classic albums (with two bonus tracks on *Live In San Francisco*) show his music at its glorious best, demonstrating why a new Shepp album was a major and exciting event. *Mama Too Tight*, especially, captures the spirit of an era and is packed with stunning playing and writing to boot.

McCoy Tyner Reaching Fourth
IMPULSE! IMP12552 CD
McCoy Tyner Together ORIGINAL JAZZ CLASSICS OJCCD955 CD
Together is a Milestone recording from late summer 1978, with a stellar personnel including Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Hutcherson, Stanley Clarke and Jack DeJohnette, while *Reaching Fourth* is Tyner's second Impulse! album, cut in 1962 with Henry Grimes and Roy Haynes. *Together* is the more sophisticated and ambitious, with plenty of fine playing and clever writing, but if I had to choose I'd go for the Impulse! reissue. Compared with the company Tyner kept in Coltrane's quartet, Grimes and Haynes are part of a tradition that was soon to be pushed into the background, at least temporarily, but they persist in playing as if they don't know about that, providing outstanding support as Tyner takes full advantage of the more relaxed set-up away from the modality and chordal minimalism of Coltrane's group. Timeless and refreshing.

Larry Young Into Somethin' BLUE NOTE CDP21734 CD
Featuring Sam Rivers, Grant Green and Elvin Jones, this is the classic Blue Note deal: pithy, relaxed improvising, some ballads, some blues, a touch of Spanish tinge, vividly captured by Rudy Van Gelder. A quartet version of "Ritha" is added after the LP's original trio cut, which omitted Green. From his pre-fusion days, *Into Somethin'* shows Young as a nimble, precise player, avoiding the volcanic gurgling which jazz organists are susceptible to. There's nothing revolutionary here, just 48 minutes of skilful, inventive mainstream modern jazz.

Pharoah Sanders Izipho Zam
STRATA EAST/CHARLY CDGR226 CD
Pharoah Sanders Jewels Of Thought IMPULSE! 12472 CD
Pharoah Sanders Thembi IMPULSE! 12532 CD
Between 1969-71, many buffs were denying Pharoah was a musician, let alone a jazz player. Corrupter of Coltrane, leader of the pig-sticking school of improvisors, how could he also produce such sweetness 'n' light singalongayaguru chants as *Izipho Zam*'s "Prince Of Peace" (appearing, thinly disguised, as "Hum Allah" on *Jewels*), much less develop into one of the most respected jazz musicians of the 80s and 90s? *Zam* features the perennially underrated Sonny Fortune, Leon Thomas, Cecil McBee and a rare Sonny Sharrock appearance. Both Impulse! albums feature McBee, who plays magnificently throughout, and Lonnie Liston Smith. *Thembi* is a rum old mixture: witness the contrast between "Red, Black And Green", where Sanders sounds like Brötzmann on an irritable day, and the sunny title tune which, along with "Prince", is out of the same box as "The Creator Has A Master Plan". Unless your own particular master plan is to collect every Sanders record, the other two are hardly essential purchases, despite some commendable individual playing. □

the compiler

New compilations: reviewed, rated and reviled

As a reaction to Techno's spartan ngour, electronic music's bass cadets have been increasingly turning towards Electro to reignite the funk ***Interdimensional Transmissions From Beyond*** (Interdimensional Transmissions IT No8 CD) compiles the four essential EPs of the same name from the Ann Arbor, Michigan label For every piece of kitschy Casio-funk like I-F's "Space Invaders Are Smoking Grass", Le Car's "Version 19" and Sluts 'N' Strings' "Starchild", there's bone-dry dub with particulated rhythms from Frankie Carbone and Flexitone, and enough dark, nasty stuff from DJ Godfather and Will Web to ensure that the balance between past and present is maintained

Dave Clarke's ***Electro Boogie Volume 2*** (Studio K7 1K7067 CD) spans the record that put LA on the HipHop map, World Class Wreckin' Cru's "Surgery", and the record that put Interdimensional Transmissions on the map, I-F's "Space Invaders" Like volume one, this is a non-stop catalogue of metaplastic synth-bass riffs and 808 claves that suggests that Clarke, like the Wreckin' Cru's Dr Dre, has "a PhD in mixology"

A bit more solidly retro in outlook than *From Beyond* and without the conceptual madness of something like Dopplereffekt's rather amazing "Sterilization" (on *Electro Boogie*), ***Track: Funk Electric*** (Hydrogen Oukebox DUKE043 CD) concentrates on filling the dancefloor With cuts like Chamber's "Mercedes 8ends", the Aux 88 remix of Laurent Garnier's "Crispy Bacon", and Les Rhythmes Digitales' mix of Mekon's "Phatty's Lunchbox", it does its job

While they often namecheck jazz, it's often easy to get the idea that the famed innovators of Detroit Techno exist in a pretty rarefied world where earth(l)y styles of black American music such as HipHop and funk don't exist. It's taken a Japanese compilation to sort that misconception out ***Eleven Phases*** (Sublime S8LC05023 CD) finds K Hand, Kenny Larkin, Claude Young, Stacey Pullen, Robert Hood, Eddie 'Flashin' Fowlkes and others reprogramming their TR 9D9s into downtempo groove modules, and bolting on lush Motor City-style strings Here's hoping the moonlighting continues

Lyricist Lounge Volume 1 (Rawkus RWK1129 2xCD) is a composite portrait of the art of MCing (the acquired pleasures of freestyling HipHop poets, ciphers of MCs hustling for record deals, beatboxing) that will do no harm to Rawkus's increasing market share and impeccable street cred Recorded at the celebrated NYC HipHop club of the album title, the first disc, compered by De La Soul, is made up of mainly straight-ahead HipHop in the vibes 'n' strings style perfected by producers like the red-hot Shaun J Period The more variegated second disc is hosted by inspired lunatics Kool Keith and Sir Menelik "live at Shea Stadium" Typically, though, The Indelible MCs' (Company Flow, Juggaknots and J-Tred) steal the show with the sequel to Co Flow's furiously atonal "The Fire In Which You Burn" a beat made out of an incredibly harsh drum machine and the smart bomb sound from an ancient *Defender* vided game, and a testament to HipHop's ever-evolving sonic hermeneutics

In a climate where all music achieves near-instant archive potential, source material for the next sonic researcher, it's interesting to hear actual library music, recorded for a context not yet decided at the moment of creation Compiled by Joel Martin and Jazz Fudge's Mark 8 over a period of three years, and from some 5000 albums ***Bite Hard: The Music De Wolfe Studio Sampler (1972-80)*** (Barely Breaking Even 88E010 CD/LP) contains a highly varied selection of mood vignettes drawn from the first British music library, founded by Meyer De Wolfe in 1909 to cater for silent movies, and expanding with the advent of radio and television and remaining to this day an independent, family-owned business. These range from John Barry-style Riviera panorama music ("Collect") to keening electronic mantras that wouldn't be out of a place on a Fax release ("Sounds Unusual")

Proof of such music's need for contextualisation comes in the shape of ***The Battle Of Bosworth*** (Trunk BARKED3 CD) Following the earlier release of selections from the 80sworth music library, Trunk Records began to receive tapes containing variations of the original material Combining some of them with takes from the likes of Klute, The Herbaliser and Ronnie & Clyde results in an album of freeform invention, in which the gap between the past and the future becomes impossible to find, let alone bridge

The latest issue of *Unknown Public*, ***All Seeing Ear*** (Unknown Public UUP09 CD), began as a film soundtrack issue of this CD periodical But editor John L Walters saw the concept broaden to embrace the visual element of music in all its aspects, from programme music to sound sculpture. Several tracks produce kaleidoscopic collages, in sound, speech and song, to sustain a vivid narrative "First Construction After Kurt Schwitters" is from a tribute to the dadaist by Christopher Fox, whose materials are taken from a radio programme about Schwitters Other pieces are by composers who are also painters, such as Tom Phillips's "Six Of Hearts" and JJ Gordon's "Calaveras", both sound religious and programmatic. More haunting is "Albo Gator" by Michael Brook, from the Kevin Spacey film *Albino Alligator* The contemporary classic on this edition is an extract from George Crumb's *Ancient Voices Of Children*, and overall, there is an incredible range and wealth of material on show

The CD produced as a companion to Mark Hudson's recent novel about the quest for the heart of African pop music, ***The Music In My Head*** (Sterns STCD1081 CD), gets further in 12 tracks than Hudson could hope to in a couple of hundred pages He is a declared Youssou N'Dour fanatic, and the 18 year old singer is represented on a 1977 rarity by the Etoile De Dakar The magnificent Alou Fane, 1980 psychedelica from Etoile 2000, an early 'fetish song' by Salif Keita and instructive sleevenotes make this worth hunting down ☐ *Reviewed by Andy Hamilton, Peter McIntyre, Peter Shapiro and Rob Young*

Label distributors & contacts

Contacts are given for labels without named UK distributors Labels not named here should be available from specialist retailers such as Depth Charge, Piccadilly, Rough Trade, These, etc In emergencies, contact likely distributors such as Cargo, Greyhound, Harmonia Mundi, Impetus, Kudos, Pinnacle, ReR, Shellshock, SRD, These, Vital, etc *NB Labels and distributors. if you spot an incorrect or missing listing in this column, please contact* The Wire *pronto*

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multi media

Rob Young meets CD-ROM mavericks, Header and AudioRom



AudioRom get interactive

A smoke-filled boxroom in the heart of Soho, central London, a Macintosh computer vibrating to the bassline throbbing through its tiny speakers. On the screen, a cursor floats over a couple of buttons, clicks and holds, and the vertigo-inducing effects of a Jamaican echo chamber stream through through the Mac's soundcard. The beat has been dropped by Wackies in Kingston, retooled by Basic Channel's Tiki Man in Berlin, and made interactive by Header in London. "We're looking for the best way to let people get inside the music," says Mark Ainley, one half of Header's two-man operation.

In the four years since Peter Gabriel's *Xplora*, the first commercial music CD-ROM to gain any real exposure, CD-ROMs have felt compelled to announce themselves as the coming of a new paradigm, a medium that will destroy centuries of music making as we know it, promising limitless capabilities for remodelling sound. However, as anyone who hass spent even five minutes mousing around a ROM will testify, their limits kick in almost as soon as your basic cognition skills warm up. At best you feel let down by the paucity of imagination exhibited by the designers who set the original parameters, at worst you feel about as dignified as a lab test chimp.

CD-ROM producers are caught between a rock and a hard place: overselling the product to the media and the potential buyer means an inevitable disappointment with the limitations of the finished article, while underselling it to potential investors is likely to leave them without a sponsor — and there's nothing like a Big Idea to make a multimedia sponsor start slavering.

But 'play' is a word central to the activity of music — both for those who make it and those who listen back to it — and, perhaps with that in mind, there are signs that CD-ROM producers are starting to fight against this pressure to be a world-changing force through point-and-click tech. When I ask Mark Ainley if the new Header CD improves on the smooth interfaces of their first ROM, 1996's *Header #1*, he replies, "No, we didn't want it to feel too cool. We wanted it to be a lot rougher." Ask him where ROM tech is heading, however, and he will change the subject. Header's new ROM is deliberately not 'open-ended'. Each interactive track riffs on a particular graphic conceit: Oanny Breaks's "Volumes" animates a dancing skeleton, Japanese duo Reflection are represtented by drifting colour splodges which can be dragged around the screen, Plug's furious breakbeat track "Header" utilises the conjuror's hands and silvery hoops that appear on his last album sleeve: clicking on an hoop turns it gold and activates a different rhythm loop, once the disembodied hands catch up with it. "Mango Drive", the transatlantic hook-up between Berlin producers Rhythm And Sound and Jamaica's Wackies All Stars, features two buttons for echo chamber action or one-drop delay. Courtney Pine's "Book Of The Dead" can be retooled by passing your cursor over a graphic of a woman in a box. In one of the more genuinely affecting modules, Steve Pickton (aka Stasis), who recently discovered he was an orphan (and has begun using his 'original' name Paul W Teebrooke), supplied Super 8 movies of the Teebrooke family, clips of which can be dragged around the screen and superimposed to alter the structure of "Original Black Gold". By not trying to replicate 'real time' activity — turntable scratching, fader flipping — Header have devised genuinely imaginative and engaging interfaces specifically tailored to each track, but they're not about to overinflate the value of their work. Like most independent records at the moment, *Header #2* will be a small pressing CD release selling through indie shops, in a low-key cardboard sleeve, and not a fractal-Photoshop gimmick in sight.

Like the Header duo, Andre Kton, director of AudioRom — the name of both another interactive musical ROM released this month, and the group that designed it — is not about to make earth-shattering claims for his product. He moved into computers after a period of struggling to get noticed in the mainstream music business. In fact, he briefly 'got there' — lucrative contract, own studio in the country — but then got bored, got out, and took an art foundation course in Wales. After



Graphic from *Header #2*

that, he set up AudioRom, which now employs ten people and has recently appeared in live club/art spaces, exhibiting a series of public access devices by which clubgoers can affect and control a piece of sequenced music by gestures in real time and space. The difference is that whereas *Header* is a compilation, the music on the *AudioRom* CD, and which feeds the interactive elements, is AudioRom's own. "This is definitely us pre-authoring and profiling our music," Kton says while spooling through some of the play areas on the new ROM. *AudioRom* just allows the user/listener to access the music via a different door from usual. For example, one track features a short horn sample attached to each letter on a computer keyboard. You can type in any word, sentence, or import any other text you like — a shopping list, poem or final bank demand. When the song plays, it's 'arranged' over a rhythm according to the order of letters and punctuation, but the flow is perfectly smooth. Once you've heard how that sounds, "you can start to mess around with the syntax of the text, and that's your route to the music, if you like," says Kton.

For another such route, they've taken the premise of Toshio Iwai's 1992 video game, *Insect Music*. Coloured objects placed at random points on a screen act as obstacles while 'trigger' bugs bounce off them around the screen. Each object has a sound or sample attached to it, and the bugs, in setting off these sounds, create an ever changing generative music. Another game is a simple painting tool, with sound and rhythm linked to the gesture of a brushstroke. It's an idea they've taken into their installation work, some of which was on display at London's ICA in March. On "Big Bevelled Button", players stand around a horizontal screen, listening to an AudioRom track on headphones. A hand passed over the screen maps a video 'brushstroke' with a corresponding sound, which travels stereodimensionally inside the user's head. "We were condensing ideas like, 'Can I paint with colour?'" explains Kton. "I'm referencing painting and mark making. Each of those colours has got a sound attached to them, so you can drive them left and right." The 'piece' that results, rather than being a finished, arranged, rounded art work, takes into account the process of working out what the hell you're meant to be doing. "You watch people on this piece, they'll actually spend half an hour on it, bathing in it," he enthuses.

These seem potentially powerful applications, but both groups seem very reluctant to open up the system to allow the user/listener to import their own sounds into these interfaces. "We had a lot of discussions about it," explains Kton, "and realised that this is about authorship as well, and where we place that line, how much autonomy do we give the user? At the same time if you hand over total autonomy, so that you can bring in your own sounds, it doesn't matter what the tempo or the key signature is, there's going to be a lot of chaos, potentially, and the aesthetic is not so coherent. The other thing is, we are the artists here, using our own technology. We're profiling our own music. It's important that we feel that aesthetic coherence. One of our objectives is to engage people with music that's pleasing, that's going to synchronise, that's going to sound like you've made something clear. Otherwise you might as well try to rewrite Cubase." □ *Header e-mail* header@header.co.uk. *Website* www.header.co.uk. *AudioRom e-mail* studio@audiorom.com. *Website* www.audiorom.com

GO TO:



RzWeb
www.residents.com

Surely even the most committed watcher of this perennially self-mystifying West Coast pop art experimental band will find something on this Website that's news. Every alley of their by-now sprawling mythology is explained (apart from the identities of the eyeballed ones themselves), and yet after an extensive trawl through the archives, you're left as entangled as you are enlightened. As well as a history of the group right back to their formation at the tail end of the 60s, there are sections devoted to all their multimedia spin-off activities: film and video, CD-ROMs, concerts, books, and miscellaneous projects. You'll find artwork and appreciations of even the albums that never actually got released, answers to such burning questions as "Why were there five versions of *Santa Dog?*", and the lowdown on a whole army of Residents associates (real and imaginary) including The Cryptic Corporation and N Senada. As official as it'll ever be, although the four-eyed foursome seem as aloof as ever.

Spoon Records
www.spoonrecords.com

There's been a fan-Can Website on-line for a number of years, but this one, recently launched onto the Web by the group's manager Hildegard (wife of Irmin) Schmidt, is the official inner space where you can observe all the stars in Can's mother sky. The Spoon site offers news on the whereabouts and projects of members and associates Holger Czukay, Jaki Liebezeit, Damo Suzuki, Malcolm Mooney, *et al*, but the best news for aficionados is a vast photo gallery featuring snapshots of the group taken throughout their existence. In addition, all Spoon back catalogue and related merchandise can be mail ordered direct from the site.

ROB YOUNG



on location

Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh



Main pic: James Hardway
Left: Bedouin Ascent
Below: Kavita Gilkes

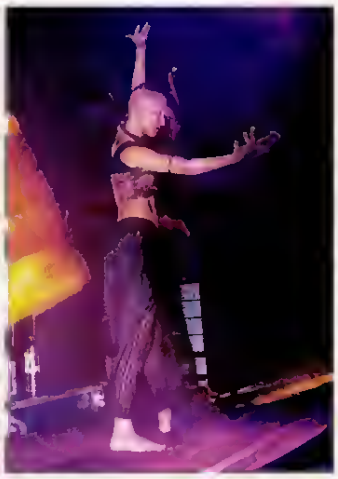
A Night Of Further East-Westercisms

UK London ICA

Inspired no doubt by (ahem) New Asian Kool club nights such as Outcaste and Talvin Singh's Anokha, and nicely timed to coincide with ASEM, the big Asia-Europe gathering of politicians in London, not to mention "the imminent collapse of the Japanese economy" (to quote Norio Ohga, president of Sony), in April London's ICA hosted three Asian fusion events. On the Friday, a night of transglobal clubbing included live link-ups with Bangkok, Tokyo and Manila — dance till dawn while currencies tumble in the background. The Thursday of the following week saw percussionists and DJs united around the flamboyant Kodo-style drumming of Joji Hirota in an event entitled Taiko To Tabla Club Mix. And tonight, Saturday, the theatre and bar are full of East-Westercisms, beneath the animated, pumping logo of Law & Auder Records. It's a launch for the latter's second concept compilation, *Further East-Westercisms*. Projected on the wall, the logo is a tirelessly jiving unisex robot with elbows that kind of flare smoke trails. This ultra-aerobic stamina is mirrored in human form by the shaven-headed dancer Kavita Gilkes, who seems to be performing for the entire four hours I'm there. Gilkes has a great repertoire of East-Westercisms, mixing Indian hand gestures, the Egyptian neck shuffle and Borough of Westminster bodypopping, all with perfect poise and a clear gaze.

However, as I wander from bar to theatre and back again, the evening seems to be falling between several stools. these Law & Auder people want to party, but there aren't enough of us to work up a good sweaty fug. We're not dancing because the music's a shade too arty, but on the other hand when I listen to the music itself there's not much going on of any substance. There are no avant garde flesh-creeping trance merchants like Rapoon, for instance. So what are we doing? Well, we're socialising, of course. We're having a natter with percussionist Ansuman Biswas about what it was like spending a week in that box in the art gallery. And we're grumbling. For example, why is it that I've never heard any music in the ICA bar that doesn't sound dreadful? Is it the low ceiling, a broken PA or the late 90s that are to blame? Bedouin Ascent (aka Kingsuk Biswas, bro' of Ansuman), Muslimgauze and Doppler 2D-2D jam away in the bar. They might be fine on vinyl, but here the volume and distortion are simply oppressive. With my fingers in my ears, I can't hear myself grumble.

Back in the theatre the atmosphere is better. Summit are a trio bathed in purple light and clouds of smoke. A Biswas stands before an ironing board laden with bells and things, but is



sadly only semi-audible. The rhythms are on a tape, and the musicians are at their mercy. There certainly seem to be problems presenting this kind of studio generated groove stuff on stage. Maybe there's a formula at work, requiring a minimum 50 per cent input by the live musicians before it works as a show.

Finitribe are a 100 per cent live artrock quintet led by a big nasty redhead in a very tight dress who smokes cigars. They are watchable all right, but it's not clear why they're here, I mean from an East-Westercism standpoint. Joi are great — two Indian DJs playing passionate Indian hymns over dance beats, miming to the vocals and flinging their arms in the air, beseeching the gods and the audience to get into their shit. Now this is more like it. A Biswas is playing on this one too, but even less audibly. Still, they all radiate a righteous fervour, and Kavita Gilkes is there again, contributing inspired writhing. With a bit of proper staging this could be a great show.

The acts come thick and fast on this crowded evening. The musical content might be lacking, but I have to admit everything is well organised. A musical highpoint is James Hardway's set — but I should declare an interest, I used to be part of this group, so you can ignore my opinion. For what it's worth, Hardway's jabbering high density rhythms generate plenty of excitement. The quartet of double bass, keyboards, flute and drums whip up a postmodern jazz furore, an intense storm of noise around a calm centre. The Asian connection becomes clear once Hardway breaks away from his keyboards and tears off his shirt to reveal his magnificent full-body Yakuza-style tattoo.

It's worth staying to the end for DJ maestro Luke Vibert. Starting with accelerated Beastie Boys, Vibert conducts a witty in-depth examination of the true meaning of the 80s, and at last we're dancing.

CLIVE BELL

PHOTOS IRIS GARRELFS

The Fall #1

USA: New York Coney Island High

Great. I give The Fall a duff review and end up on the next Fall album in a song called "Yank Wax" *"Man with frog name/What's in his ears?/What's in his ears?"* Or end up on the business end of one of MES's cigarettes, or get fired. Ah, but one advantage of not being in The Fall is that Mark E Smith can't fire you, as he has done Craig Scanlon (the tersest guitarist in rock), Marc Riley and a host of others. If 1997 and 1998's personnel trends are any indication, MES's hanging jury is giving way to a hanging judge, as he announces to the world, "If it's me and your Granny on the bongos, it's a Fall gig" Doesn't exactly make for a fun ride in the van for the group, or much of a show, as seen at Coney Island High (which is neither in Coney Island, nor a high school)

After interminable opening sets by local groups, The Fall 98 ambled out and worked up an intro for The Marquis. Arriving with a welcome "Ah-eh!" and sporting a shiner on his right eye, Smith started as he meant to continue, the anti leader who drew the eye but rejected any responsibility for putting on a show. With a twitchy gravitas copped, it seemed, from both Johnny Cash and John Quincy Adams, he chewed air, blinked and checked that his mic was plugged in about 1000 times. The tics even enhance MES's profile as one of Rock's True Somethings, number one in a field of one: the dissolute rock librarian. Looking some ten years older than he is, MES still managed to exude menace while he stood there wobbling. Again, not exactly a rock show, but definitely worth a trip out of the house.

Shedding his tweed jacket after a sort-of rollicking "Ten Houses Of Eve", MES revealed a dark shirt with big red roses woven into each shoulder, a nod perhaps to Country stoics who also like to alternate brilliant vocals with no-show performances. He earned his stoicism, moving in time with the music only twice, pounding the microphone during "I'm A Mummy" and shimmying, a little, during "Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul"

The Fall's implicit musical manifesto has always embodied a touch of 'What chords?' mulishness, an anti-technique belief in the power of garage rock's grimy thunk to raise up the visceral rock moment to defeat filigree and Steve Hillage both. But this group was, more plainly, just at odds. MES's voice, *that* voice, held the crowd's respectful attention for a good while, as the group struggled through what sounded like a live rehearsal. Karl Burns thundered and Steve Hanley tried to lock with him while guitarist Tommy Crooks played inaudible power chords from other songs and keyboardist Julia Nagle fought to stay awake, yawns and all. The group transformed (or mulched) stormers like "Masquerade" and "Scareball" into endurance tests, caning the main riff to death without working up any steam. Two chestnuts, "Hip Priest" and "Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul", saved some face, allowing Burns and Hanley to lessen the burden of figuring out what to do, ie get soft here, stop here, then get loud. The mighty "Inch" devolved into power chord mush, stealing what could have been the evening's finest moment as MES woke up to yowl *"The house is falling in!"* The key to the disarray was probably the obvious, seen best halfway through the set when MES announced that the group would take a ten minute break. With grim fury, Hanley threw down his bass and stormed off, while the rest of the group followed, no happier. After a crisp four minutes, they returned, maybe happy to have their pep talk over with, but no more primed to rock. As someone in front of me said, "It's going to be a short tour"

Even if he hadn't dragged everyone off stage for reorientation, dictatorial flourishes abounded. When things got especially lost, MES would drop his fist onto Nagle's keyboard for some Sun Ra clusters, turn up Tommy Crooks's amp and occasionally leave the stage, directing Crooks to finish singing the song at hand. To add to the general discomfort, his directions were right; Nagle was well south of rocking (or present) and Crooks was never loud enough, until he gave in for the final number, "Behind The Counter", and let his amp work a bit.

The Fall seem to be running on inertia, the primal rock 'n' roll dream materialising in the studio, ironically, but chased from the stage by one too many hip lectures.

SASHA FRERE-JONES

The Fall #2

USA: New York Brownie's

We think we've come for a Fall show: riff, repeat, rant, repeat. We don't know that we're about to witness a theatre of cruelty extravaganza the likes of which don't often grace a group's performance more than once.

Like the shows at Coney Island High a few days earlier, the first date of the group's two night residency at the tiny Brownie's club begins with "Spencer Must Die". And again like the Coney Island shows, the group have been vamping the song's central riff for a long time before Mark E Smith wanders on stage, looking like he's got one foot in the grave and the other in the nearest bar. He seems less interested in singing than in annoying the rest of the group as much as possible, by leaving the stage and twiddling all the amp dials. The group is sharp, tight, loud, and pretty clearly about to snap. Smith is not exactly unwilling to goad them into it. During "Hip Priest" he absents himself again, sings a few lines, hands the microphone to an audience member (who knows the words), gets back on stage and mimes along. The end vamp is drawn out until Smith finally gets bored with it. The group's patience is being tested to the limit.

In the middle of "Free Range", Smith starts messing with Karl Burns's drum kit. It's the last straw. Burns stops playing, leaps over the drums at Smith and pins him against the wall, knocking over the bass rig in the process. Steve Hanley separates them. Burns makes 'Fuck you, I quit' gestures and stalks off stage. Somebody from the audience grabs a mic and starts yelling, "Come back here and play, you fuckin' coward! I paid 12 dollars for this! Get back up here and play your fuckin' drums!"

Meanwhile, the rest of the group is, a little ludicrously, attempting to keep the song going.

After a few minutes of chaos, things settle down again. Burns is back, Smith gives a completely incoherent speech about how a cab driver pulled a gun on him earlier and "these three fuckin' Scotsmen were talking backstage about it" Now it's his turn to leave. The group plays "Levitate" No Smith. They start "Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul" Our boy reappears, launches into the song and nearly clocks Hanley with the microphone. Hanley somehow keeps smiling gamely. Smith manages to completely mangle Hanley's and Tommy Crooks's amp settings. Now Crooks seems to be kicking Smith hard.

After a few more songs in this vein — Crooks inaudible, Hanley way too loud and bassy, everybody slightly out of sync — the two of them down their instruments on "He Pep" and head off, followed by Burns. But Mark isn't done yet. He gets keyboardist Julia Nagle to play "Powderkeg", and improvises a monologue about how "words are the ultimate means of self-expression, I saw it written in *The New York Times*" and the owner of the Brownie's club just hoped it made three figures." Smith picks up Crooks's abandoned guitar, lets it drop — WHUNK! — picks up the bass, stares at it, and tosses it into the drum kit — CRASH! — drops his mic on the floor — WHUNK! — and leaves. Less than 24 hours later, he will be arrested for allegedly beating up Julia Nagle.

On the way out, my friend says, "I'm coming back tomorrow, and I wanna see some *blood*." The next night we find a sign on Brownie's door: "FALL SHOW CANCELLED — MARK E SMITH IS IN JAIL."

DOUGLAS WOLK



Mark E Smith at Coney Island High

PHOTOS: CURTIS HARVEY



Han Bennink. Inset: The Clusone Trio

PHOTOS: MARC MARNIE

Sound Check
UK Edinburgh Theatre Workshop

Packing seven gigs into less than eight hours, Sound Check brought together Edinburgh musicians with the big guns of European improvisation. Various performances drew on the formidable individual talents of The Clusone Trio: cellist Ernst Reijseger, percussionist Han Bennink and saxophonist Michael Moore.

I arrived at 4pm, already two sets down in the day, but just in time to catch Reijseger's trio with local saxophonist Phil Bancroft and drummer Steve Noble. By his own standards, Noble was fairly restrained. His measured performance was deferential both to Bancroft's relative inexperience and Reijseger's nominal leadership. Reijseger seldom plays his cello as a conventional chamber instrument, but whether he slaps it, rubs it, scrapes its stand around the floor, or tucks it up in his lap to play like a guitar, he always seems to be exploring logical extensions of its practice. As he warmed to the context, Reijseger inspired his cohorts to take up the rhythmic or harmonic elements he was introducing. Homeboy Bancroft contributed with admirable restraint, and was always on the nail.

A masterly duet followed, with veteran guitar lasher Derek Bailey giving a visceral edge to a vaudevillean performance by Han Bennink. As his kit fell apart under him, Bennink hurled his sticks to the floor in mock anger, but in reality with musical intent — at least, he gave the impression he knew what the petulant act would sound like. He also played the floor, a chair, and a drumstick stuck in his mouth while waiting for a replacement snare, which was hardly out of the hapless assistant's hands before he began playing it. Bennink plays for laughs, but he's always utterly musical. His immense good humour also has an underlying menace, which emanates from his imposing physical presence. Seated quietly stage right, a lesser musician than Bailey would go unnoticed. Bailey himself often seems insulated from co-performers, but this was a great working contrast, with Bailey goaded by Bennink's mercurial presence into raising his game. His aural lacerations left the imagination bloodied but elated.

Having missed the teaming of Bill Wells's Octet with Michael Moore, I returned for the performance of *Hearing Voices*. Originally intended as a trio performance, tonight they had to do without absent trombonist Joost Buis. Nevertheless, Phil Bancroft's brother Tom, himself a composer and drummer, undertook an interpretation of this ambitious score, with John Telfer accompanying on baritone sax. *Hearing Voices* utilises a computer-controlled soundtrack, each performer hears a different part, but it is mostly inaudible to the audience. In conception this is laudably ambitious, and in performance there were many compelling moments, but the overall effect was unengaging; particularly glaring was the failure to integrate samples of often meaningless dialogue with the rest. Still, it was nice to hear the baritone sax utilised with intelligence, and even better to see it strapped to a musician like Telfer, who has the physique of a stick insect.

The Clusone Trio united for a closing performance which, although coolly blending Improv and jazz standards in their inimitable style (they have a particular fondness for Irving Berlin), gradually took on the air of a sedate perambulation. An inspired sprint for the finish line, or even the knockabout antics of a sack race, would have made a more fitting end to the day.

TIM OWEN

Organic Synthetic
New Zealand Auckland Herzog

The normally stern German is beaming. "It is the best concert I ever give," says Bernd Friedmann, aka Nonplace Urban Field, still bathing in the sweet afterglow of his amazing performance at Organic Synthetic. This night of neo-dub and Electronica is the climax to Cologne-based Friedmann's second summer sojourn in New Zealand. It's made possible by his friendship with Kiwi-based ex-pat Brit Stinky Jim, whose group Unitone Hifi toured Europe with Nonplace Urban Field as part of an Incoming! label package tour a couple of years ago.

Friedmann's 98 visit began with a stunning performance at The Gathering — 8000 ecstatic nouveau hippies writhing for two days in one of NZ's awesome natural outdoor amphitheatres. Aside from accumulating audio delights from geothermal hot spots (the secret mudpool project) on this trip, 'The Burnt Man' (as he is colloquially known) has taken time to soak up some of NZ's rugged isolationist ambience.

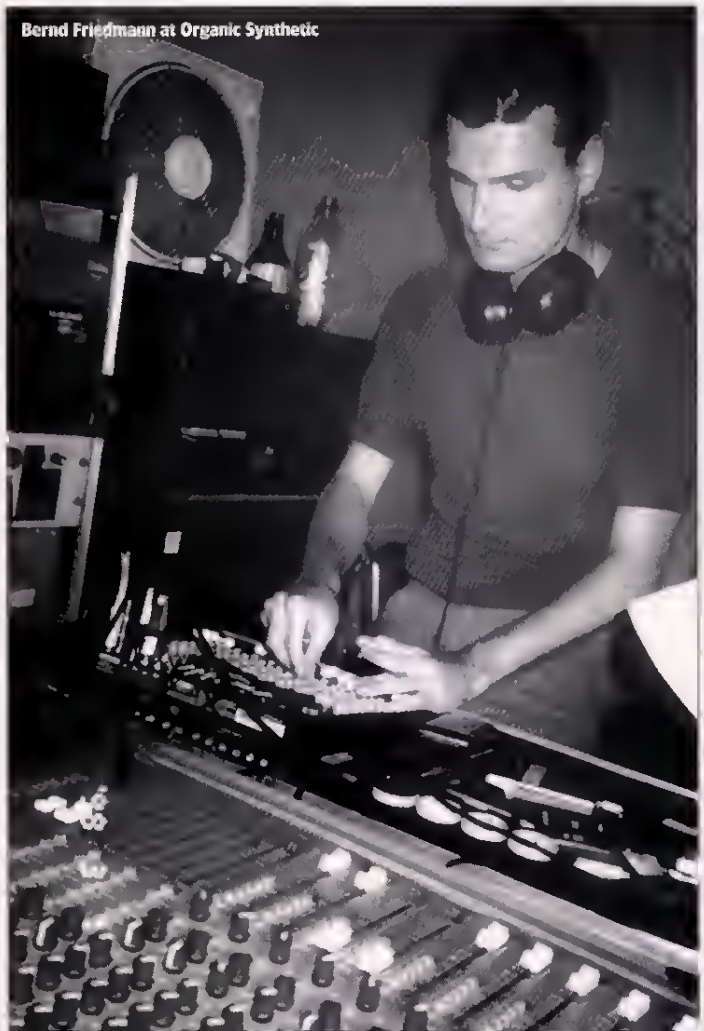
A month long power blackout has reduced central Auckland to dysfunctional hysteria and driven many retailers to the wall. Tonight, though, the power is on (with massive generators on standby, just in case) and a reassuringly diverse bunch of adventurous punters are sweating in the post-industrial environment of the Herzog club, decorated with Catholic iconography. Club culture took some time to get off the ground here, but over the past few years a surfeit of international DJs has helped raise its profile. Unfortunately, undiscerning, buck hungry promoters have also popularised every rancid variety of 'uplifting' House, so it's a welcome relief to discover NZ also has an avid audience for electronic music that doesn't subscribe to predetermined musical belief systems. The audience, happy to shirk the dance imperative and groove to subtler rhythms, warm up to Pitch Black, a duo of Mike Hodgson (one of NZ's Industrial/Ambient pioneers and an innovative audio-visualist) and Paddy Free (programmer/percussionist extraordinaire). Pitch Black aren't afraid to resort to four-to-the-floor Techno, or even psycho-hallucinogenic samples from a previous era. The end result is a monstrous cacophony incorporating groovy undertows of heavy dub. Stinky Jim's post-Unitone Hifi group Soundproof make their Auckland debut to a muted but appreciative response. They comprise Unitone's Jim and recording engineer Angus McNaughton, and upcoming Incoming! act Trigger. They inject a dancehall vibe with understated samples and treatments that tonight are sometimes overcome by the sound system's gutshaking bass bins. However, they're a godsend for anyone after 90s digi-dub. When Bernd Friedmann comes on, it's obvious he's been listening to Stinky Jim's extensive collection of historic dub. He was using his patented MYO — Mix Your Own — system, which, according to Bernd, consists of "eight separate tracks of pre-recorded sounds and sequences played on MiniDiscs... the composition that results is composed of the spontaneous interference of the various independent tracks." Friedmann displayed an unerring ability to confound and delight with his arsenal of tricky drum programs, without lapsing into the grating 'Look at me, Ma!' virtuosity of Squarepusher. No matter how Friedmann mixes his chosen portions on the night, the music has a predetermined feeling of great graft, attention to detail and overall sense of integrity that are generally missing

from the burgeoning ranks of drum 'n' tronica Friedmann develops his ideas out of a genuine interest in musical innovation heroes like Conlon Nancarrow form a template for a revised language built on impossibly complex percussive clusters, mallet-like tones and a sense of repetition offset by savagely condensed surprise elements Once a drummer for a New Wave group styled on Electro-gnnd exponents DAF, Friedmann has long been interested in percussion, not as a clattering backdrop to musical notation, but as the music's core structure

His audio samples are harassed and pushed into unfamiliar contexts by the unforgiving mixmaster Though he relishes in the set's ever-changing sound canvas and shifts in style, from dub to minimal Techno to soundscaping, the audience is more than willing to keep up with him They're rewarded with his remix of fellow Dot label artist Quant, which must be one of the most jaw-dropping expositions of tricky drum 'n' bass extant It sets up a frenzied noise climax that resembles the most feverish moments of early Neu!

In all, it's shaping up to be an important year for Bernd Friedmann he's already completed a collaboration with Atom Heart, presently exiled in Chile, and the Stinky Jim/Friedmann mudpool emission ("Sound you can smell," as Frank Zappa might have said) Defining his aesthetic, Friedmann says. "My ears didn't develop to receive highly redundant codes such as commands or loops, but to manoeuvre myself safely through the darkness Therefore I can't shut them down This sense is so reliable What are the sounds that please this sense? Non-repetitive patterns, unlimited in its depths, such as the ocean, a waterfall, rain, bubbling mud, the wind through leaves, opposite to ground humming, traffic and lawnmower The trick is to achieve similar structured patterns within a common musical language Common in so far as it has a start/endpoint, a beat, etc Programmings can take a while until it becomes an indefinable, naturalistic mumbling of the elements"

GARY STEEL



Bernd Friedmann at Organic Synthetic

Disastrodrome!

UK London South Bank Centre

In the darkness someone has farted It is a man's fart. Maybe it's the chilliburgers from the al fresco burger bar, a hastily erected pitch staffed by David Thomas in the puddles outside the QEH Maybe it's something altogether more profound I pass no judgment. I'm in a worn leather chair in Calagan's Diner, formerly the Purcell Room, looking for an authentic experience Thomas has broken new ground and somehow got the South Bank Centre to host *Disostodrome!*, a weekend of the weird "Don't expect art", the old Pere Ubu motto, has accordingly been replaced by "No trite and unnecessary talking" — big yellow signs floating in space Luckily my mind is a blank. I wander, primed for poetry Singer Daved Hild pulls a blanket from his mic stand to reveal a ventriloquist's dummy, bound and gagged, a hostage to our old enemy Art As he paces across the stage, hands reaching to his brow as if trying to stop the thoughts escaping, Held runs his right forefinger across his top teeth in a curious nervous tick, again and again He sings of avoiding veal and being crushed by circumstance His hair has receded His lyrics are good, but the onstage mix of his backing tapes is too muddy and anyway he's buried beneath the din of MIDI-guitarist Keith Moliné

I'm trying to locate the source of some laughter along the row A man with a camera makes an elaborate play of taking Held's photograph Is it him? Is he one of the performers? We were promised *No irony*, despite the press previews and the loudspeakers

Held is replaced by Peter Blegvad, polymath, who spews forth sparkling jewels of beautiful thought. John Greaves on bass, looking as if he's being goosed by a ghost, and Chris Cutler on drums, sucking air like a goldfish in a bowl, form a fine, lopsided rhythm section to flesh out Blegvad's luminous lyrics It doesn't go on long enough All too soon we're whisked away to Jackie Leven, "a man's man", Thomas tells us — an introduction that has toes curling even before the lardy Celt, his rugby socks worn outside his trousers, gives voice to his welling heart. Hallucinatory visions of Iron John gatherings, the pawky orgies of ill-advised self-revelation where grown men weep into the gorse, whip their kit off and start banging on log drums, rise up and hang above Leven's head like a Scotch mist. It forms a miasma of sentimentality into which I'm drawn by duty, a duty to my fellow men But with growing horror I realise that I'm simply not up to it — so instead I head to the bar, that quiet grove of glasses and cigarette smoke, a reservation set aside for all the failed males whose burdens go unsung in the fiery furnace that burns like an oven full of bridies As I stare into the far distance of the vast beige and concrete foyer, I weep silently at the failure of my soul to respond By the time The Kidney Brothers (who, disappointingly, really are brothers) present their urban wasteland blues, with wild mouth harp and guitar playing as flat and sharp as the brim of a steeltown homburg, I'm too wrapped up in self-consciousness to enjoy it. I come from Catford, I tell someone, I am not an anthropologist

The second night presents an epic in *Mirror Man* here the dead rise up to say something or other, bashful corpses played by the weekend's stars. The scale and the vision of the project are a shot in the arm Thomas presides, in red plastic apron, a vast maitre d' — like Sidney Greenstreet playing God in that movie where they're all on a liner Perhaps it's the scale of the thing, but Peter Hammill is under-used, Cutler potters about, all is drowned out in the impressionistic wash of The Two Pale Boys The project starts, drifts, stalls Too often it seems the gas has run dry in the gas station of broken promises, where we paw over the salad of the bad cafe, contemplating too many clouds and long straight roads Or something. Abandoned in a dustbowl of bombast, Linda Thompson reaches out and offers a genuinely extraordinary musical moment, but isn't that an Elvis number she's singing? Unexpected, beautiful but just a minute whiff of kitsch? I'm thinking again I am not in the room

Night three Jane Bom-Bane is twee and arch, I'm too tired to make the effort. If wearing a hat could make you cute, I guess I'd wear a hat. Bob Holman, the Phil Silvers of performance poetry, is a class act, however, and knows it. His poetry is funny and moving and can do without the ubiquitous Moliné, who joins him for reasons that I can only suppose are contractual The big theoretical stuff comes next and I whip out my notebook. David Thomas's lecture is called "The Geography Of Sound In The Magnetic Age" His thesis. it doesn't mean much, so relax The big stuff happens at a dumber level Whatever I'm trying to get into the *spirit*

He raps about hieroglyphs and how objects form a perspective on futures that never happened I'm reminded of Neil Oram, who thought that the highlands of Scotland were manmade Cleveland, Thomas is saying, is the centre of the earth There is no such thing as thought. Musicianship is a Masonic lodge The audience doesn't care, it is only after a unique experience He ranges far, but in full swing the rant dries up and he fumbles for a fall guy "Most people can't handle the truth," his voice takes on a Dalek caste as I scribble, "*particularly journalists*" Ouch I wince, like a real journalist would Then I pick my teeth up from the floor and head for the exit, smarting. I stand at the bus stop in the rain and make all the enemies of the press form a queue, a long queue which snakes around the corner Tonight David Thomas will have to wait in line

Next night I'm back, naturally, for the grand finale — Pere Ubu, 20 years down the line Last time I saw them was at the notorious Night Of The Long Overcoats at North London Poly, supported by The Virgin Prunes. This time it's Jackie Leven, back from the borders of oblivion with Doll By Doll, the first pub rock group ever to play the Queen Elizabeth Hall Ubu are legends, so I ignore Thomas's attack on the Stooges of the Media Priests, stop listening so closely, get more and more drunk till the irony and internal dialogue evaporate altogether As the man says, mess liberates As they launch into "Chinese Radiation" and the lights bounce off the bald pates of the VIPs down front, it's clear we're going to have fun

ED BAXTER

PHOTO CHRIS TAKLAVA MAGAZINE

print run

New music books: read, raved about, roughed up

More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures In Sonic Fiction

By Kodwo Eshun

QUARTET PBK £10

As Kodwo Eshun is the first to admit, this book is not for everyone. Without even pausing to take a steadying breath, he dives straight into a savage diatribe against the "Trad sublime" of the mainstream dance music press. He makes no compromises to the uninitiated — you take the book on his terms or not at all. If you believe that a great groove should be danced to but never thought about, or that black music is capable of only expressing poignant humanism and preternatural physicality, then bury your nose in one of the inkies and don't even bother. But for those of us who like reading about music almost as much as listening to it, *More Brilliant Than The Sun* is nearly as exciting as the delirious moment in Parliament's "Mothership Connection" when Thomas Dorsey, Chuck Berry, James Brown and Sun Ra all converge in the black hole of George Clinton's mutating, mixadelic rhythmachine to make the past and the future one and the same.

Eshun's premise is that while (in Jacques Attali's formulation) music embodies the future before language can, music criticism is hopelessly mired in an outdated conceptual framework. To overcome this, Eshun patterns his thinking after the technology that has revolutionised music: like the sampler, he recognises only noise and input and attempts to process them as if the only theoretical baggage he carries is the microchip in his head. So he phase-shifts between exploding all received notions of the music of John and Alice Coltrane, and illuminating the amorphous domain occupied by Underground Resistance, and backspins from discussion of Rammellzee to William Burroughs. Like a Cubase program or a turntablist mixtape, his writing is a blur of "infovelocity", he grows a prosthetic ear in order to detect the prophetic signals transmitted in 1968 by George Russell's *Electronic Sonata For Souls Loved By Nature*, his writing is, indeed, "mixillogical".



Above: Mantronix, George Russell, John Coltrane and George Clinton get sucked into Kodwo Eshun's sonic chaosmos

Like the music he champions and the machine he's not afraid of becoming, Eshun believes that the world can be recreated through word play. A slip of the tongue can create a new way of seeing, the sliding signifier can solidify, if only for a moment, into something new: "Rays = raze = raise through homophonic processes the scientist harnesses the radiation flowing through him." Taking his cues from P-Funk, breakbeat science, *On The Corner* and Mantronix, *More Brilliant Than The Sun* is a manifesto for the instability of meaning or, as Eshun would no doubt have it, a pantheon of the "chaosmos".

It might just be the ultimate recognition of the fact that music is truly in the ear of the beholder — there's certainly no one else who hears music the way he does. Then again, it does make me want to go back to my records to see if I can hear what he hears in all the music he hoovers up because I *want* to believe in his clairaudience. I imagine that his is the kind of book that will be unearthed in the not too distant future by people desperately trying to create their own scene. They'll pick out catchphrases and liberally dot them around their fanzines or Websites or flyers for post-everything performance events.

The book is so breathless and dense that this kind of approach is probably the only way to make sense of it. Ideas leap off the page with the sound of the velocity that he valorises. "HipHop is an analogy machine," he pronounces, even as he pursues his own dictum: in their ability to capture motion, for example, a George Roy Hill car chase and a flare scratch inhabit the same stratum. At this velocity, Eshun pulls off some reversals of critical commonplaces so dazzling (cf the Coltranes), you're not sure whether they're blinding or illuminating, but they invariably leave you gasping — in his reading of Detroit Techno, Kraftwerk's Dusseldorf "is the Mississippi Delta", so that white Europeans are the ones who are "more natural" and African-Americans are the bastardizers of culture.

As he travels through the dataverses of sonic fiction (where sci-fi and sound collapse into each other), what emerges is a persuasive obliteration of the myth of a singular blackness in which the symbolic violence and alien utterances of the transformer scratch replace the transformative power and peace-in-the-valley yearnings of gospel. The physicality of African-American religion and the gospel tradition is replaced by the science of AfroFuturist music, which — unlike classical

science that "drains the blood of life and leaves everything vivisected" — is "a science of sensory engineering" and an "intensification of sensation"

Unsurprisingly, there are places where he misses the mark in his rush to hear his ideas confirmed in music (but, hey, don't we all?) Even so, this is the work of a writer who is desperately trying to break past language barriers to grasp at the ineffable qualities of music. It may not live up to the title, but it comes very close

PETER SHAPIRO

The Land Without Music: Music, Culture And Society In Twentieth-Century Britain

By Andrew Blake

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS PBK £14 99

The title refers to Germany's description of Britain during World War I Andrew Blake, a professor of cultural studies at Winchester, wants to contest that judgment. His discipline is regularly dissed in these pages Maybe it's simply academia getting too close for comfort; a quick list of *Wire* faves — Benjamin, Adorno, Barthes, Deleuze, Jameson, McClary, Plant — shows many mentors in common Blake's book stems from seminars held at the University of East London Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* provides a basis for discussion Again, a *Wire* resonance Kodwo Eshun began his review of David Toop's *Ocean Of Sound* with his coinage "all that is solid melts into aether" (*The Wire* 141)

Interestingly enough, the provenance of this 'poetic' phrase gets forgotten It's from *The Communist Manifesto* As often when classic insights are recycled, elements go missing Marx was not describing a natural, eternal property of things, but a historical event with an agent: it is capitalist economic 'progress' that does the melting And the result posited is not postmodern giddiness, but proletarian realism The full quote runs. "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and people are at last compelled to face with sober senses, their real conditions of life, and their relations with their kind."

Blake is no Marxist (his politics steer closer to laissez-faire anarchism), but he too wants to cut through to something real He has sung in choirs and played saxophone (he was in Man Jumping, a truly dreadful 80s jazz/Minimalist outfit he admits would be "stretching a point" to call Canterbury Rock) This grasp of music as a material practice enables him to puncture a series of myths. Herbert von Karajan's obituarists regretted the "smoothness" and "brutality" of his conducting Blake shows that this mysterious quality stemmed from Karajan's insistence on adequate rehearsal time and state of the art recording, both rare in London The classical establishment's critical standards are exposed as ignorant and parochial

An opponent of what he calls Rock Romanticism, Blake points out that Jimmy Page achieved his guitar sound by miking his amplifier 20 feet from from behind (rather than by studying Aleister Crowley and taking drugs) An illuminating dissection of musical 'Englishness' — Benjamin Britten organising the Aldeburgh Festival in rural Sussex with financial backing from the BBC, Faber and Decca — echoes Eric Hobsbawm in the hands of a technocratic ruling class, "'tradition' is a fabrication," Blake writes "The musical cement of 'patriotic' nostalgia — Glenn Miller and The Inkspots — reveals the same dependence on America as military victory in World War II" Here, Blake's musical investigations unite personal and political history

However, though he defends Theodor Adorno's dialectical method (while contesting his judgments), Blake's sociology is closer to Chicago School market research than to Frankfurt School Marxism Hostile to both punk and the New Complexity composers (Ferneyhough, Dillon, Finnissy, etc), Blake sees all assaults on the mainstream as arrogant and elitist. Here he adopts the patronising, peculiarly middle class version of postmodernism 'let's surrender 'elite' culture for 'the popular', and everything in the garden is lovely So Susan McClary's cultural studies-derived orthodox reverence for Madonna is defended versus radical rave theorists Simon Reynolds and Joy Press (whose partisan views are attacked as Adornian "if it sounds bad, it's good") Blake concludes by commending the classical lite of Judith Weir and Mark-Anthony Turnage, apparently they break with the "male elitism" of "establishment modernism" As in McClary's *Feminine Endings*, what starts as brave critique lapses into apology for the South Bank/Sunday papers status-quo Lo-fi, free improvisation, new compositional strategies by Braxton, Zorn, Barrett and Fell all indicate that Blake is falling for false, conformist answers to real musical and social dilemmas

Blake's own account of the origins of Radio 2 — from ENSA, which organised entertainment for the troops during World War II, to the Light Programme's *Music While You Work* — shows how Easy Listening and 'non-serious' music were deployed to serve the needs of national capital Although a severe critic of Little Englandism (and scoring PC points by calling Britpop racist), the only way forward for Blake is the market. Bhangra and Ambient, for example, are vaunted for their potential contribution towards the British export drive So Blake cannot criticise the economic basis of patriotism the interests of said national capital The contradictions of commerce and populism require more careful unpicking than this

Blake's formal analysis also suffers from reluctance to pinpoint contradiction Despite attacks on traditional musicology as "mere description", that charge can be levelled at his graphic exposition of Colosseum's "Valentyne Suite" If, instead of resorting to positivist notation, Blake interpreted form as a site of conflict, he might register how commercialism tends to reduce music to an ever-the-same, to product-for-the-solvent rather than a life changing experience However, since this can only be revealed by showing up the aesthetic limitations of mainstream product — a practice Blake condemns as elitist and modernist, — such sober assessment of the real conditions of music never arrives

Writing like someone who has never been poor, Blake is blind to the harsh denials hidden behind consumer choice Instead, commercialism is celebrated because it "enriches" the culture — by supplying a diversity niche-marketed to precisely the identities market research sets up in the first place! It is amazing that a commentator, who grounds his approach in history and a tough assessment of musical form, cannot grasp the profound connection between musical innovation and revolt against market categories (the 20s and 60s seeing crucial developments in both) If Blake understood how avant garde dissent keeps such ideas and possibilities alive, maybe he wouldn't dismiss *The Wire* as an "anorakzine", and maybe *Land Without Music* could explain why, although laissez-faire capitalism makes every cultural certainty melt into air, certain economic iniquities remain strangely insoluble

BEN WATSON



Stax o' power: Isaac Hayes

Soulsville USA: The Story Of Stax Records

By Rob Bowman

BOOKS WITH ATTITUDE HBK £16 99

Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm & Blues, Black Consciousness And Race Relations

By Brian Ward

UCL PRESS PBK £14 95

In the Preface to *Soulsville USA* Stax scholar Rob Bowman gives two clues about his often irksome approach to telling the story of the great Memphis soul label "*Soulsville USA* is the story of a company", and, "While I like a good tale as much as anybody else, personally I am obsessed with accuracy" He ain't kidding The book is peppered with footnotes like, "I have found various documentation that suggests that this figure is $1 6 million but according to a Union Planters schedule of loans to Stax and its related affiliates, the figure should be $1 5 million." This wouldn't be much of an issue if Bowman confined such nitpicking to the footnotes, but it often creeps into the main text. *Soulsville USA* tells you more than

anyone would ever want to know about Stax, but (as Bowman admits) there's still lots missing. For instance, the label's later years are reduced to a series of litigations and tax proceedings. Gone from this account of Stax are good, if not great, records by people like Inez Foxx, Sons Of Slum, Roy Lee Johnson, 24 Carat Black, Black Nasty and Sho' Nuff, while legitimately great records by The Bar-Kays get very short shrift.

Bowman's obsessiveness does pay some dividends, though. In among all the facts and figures are great stories such as the one about the drummer on Isaac Hayes's "By The Time I Get To Phoenix", who got cramps in his arm playing 15 minutes of quarter notes during Ike's interminable intro rap. Picking up his desperate signals, the pianist came over, took the drumstick from his hand and continued playing in perfect time while the drummer massaged his arm.

With his severe over-interviewing of most of the living participants in the Stax story, Bowman creates a detailed, evocative picture of the heady environment of the studio at 926 E McLemore. Maybe it was as magical and all-encompassing as Bowman makes it out to be, but the book feels like it was written in a vacuum. Motown is hardly mentioned until the later years, when Al Bell bought out Stax's white owner, Jim Stewart, and tried to turn it into a rival model to Motown's black capitalism. The civil rights struggle must have had some kind of impact on the musicians considering they were situated pretty close to ground zero, but it doesn't figure until the chapter covering 1967.

Any student of soul must answer the question of how farmboy crackers such as The MGs' Steve Cropper and Donald 'Duck' Dunn, and Muscle Shoals players like Spooner Oldham and Dan Penn were at least partly responsible for what is generally perceived as the grittiest, 'blackest' soul music ever made. Bowman's answer is to describe the influence of the Grand Ol' Opry radio show on many of the Stax artists and to show how the integrated Booker T & The MGs worked together to produce records like "Time Is Tight", "Tramp", "Knock On Wood" and "Soul Man".

In *Just My Soul Responding*, University of Newcastle professor Brian Ward, on the other hand, tries to provide a corrective to received notions about 'blackness' in music by positioning the various post-war R&B styles, from jump-blues to disco, along a "black-white musical — and lyrical — spectrum" which illuminates the prevailing African-American attitudes towards cultural nationalism and assimilation at those particular times. The result is a worthwhile, if somewhat worthy, history of the blues continuum that thankfully doesn't view crossover as the ultimate evil.

Mapping the twists and turns of the civil rights and black power eras through lyrics and changing musical styles is asking for trouble, and *Just My Soul Responding* does trip up when Ward is too literal in his interpretations. His strength, though, lies in the fact that he knows his shit (unlike so many academics writing about music). Ward is particularly good when he deals with early rock 'n' roll — especially the vocal groups and his impressively even-handed treatment of the cover version phenomenon — about which he is passionate and authoritative, and with the vagaries of black radio, on which he has done some impressive research.

For most of the book, Ward brilliantly criticises Nelson George's simplistic and chauvinistic history of the R&B industry, but by the time funk, Philly International and disco roll around, both his excitement and command of the material seems to recede to the point where he can only echo George's less-than-equanimous readings. I'm not sure what record he was listening to when he wrote, "The O'Jays' majestic "Backstabbers" described the black man's fear that the sexually insatiable, shamelessly materialistic black woman of macho mythology was entertaining his so-called friends behind his back." There's no mention whatsoever of the woman's behaviour in the song, the men are clearly the backstabbers, not the narrator's lover.

Ward then repeats George's assertion that Philly International's head honcho Kenny Gamble "developed a tough, male-dominated, anti-materialist perspective". While the vast majority of Philly's artists were men, after early records like The O'Jays' "One Night Affair", Philly International hits began an interrogation of black masculinity following the failure of the black power movement. Ward ignores (or misinterprets) songs like "Backstabbers", The Intruders' "I'll Always Love My Mama", The O'Jays' stunning "Don't Call Me Brother" and The Temptations' "Papa Was A Rolling Stone", which challenged machismo in a way never seen before or since. Similarly difficult, but major, musicians like Sly Stone, Earth Wind & Fire and Chic are forced to the sidelines, all of whom have more to say about race relations than Joe Tex, who remarkably gets more mentions than all three combined.

PETER SHAPIRO



Say something spiritual: Iggy Pop

Inside The Music: Conversations With Contemporary Musicians About Spirituality, Creativity And Consciousness

By Dimitri Ehrlich

SHAMBHALA PBK $15

Even if you don't read the music press, there's no escape from interviews with musicians — they lie in wait for you in colour supplements, on *Woman's Hour*, on Breakfast TV. We consume so many muso interviews that it is easy to forget what an odd activity it is — an intense and balletic confrontation, usually a pas de deux, a confessional if you like, in which artists, applying rigorous self-examination, are invited to bare their souls, their creative impulses, their deepest values. The journalist hovers like a patient priest, respectfully nurturing the atmosphere in which the pregnant phrase or the penetrating witticism will drop into the lap of the recording angel, the tape recorder. Those of us in therapy or Catholicism will find it familiar, but for the rest of us it's a foreign activity.

I'm being a little idealistic perhaps — I'm not talking about the tabloid hatchet job or the chat show froth about when you're next album's out — but the interview is *ideally* an exploration of creativity, spirituality and consciousness, and the reason many musicians find interviews such a struggle is that is it is hard work re-examining and explaining your intentions again and again to someone maybe ill-equipped to understand them.

Dimitri Ehrlich, formerly of *New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*, currrently at MTV, has assembled 20 interviews focusing specifically on whatever connections the musician would like to make between spirituality and creativity. Musically, his subjects range wide, from Jeff Buckley to Philip Glass, via PM Dawn and Ziggy Marley. They are almost all wealthy, high achieving US males, and of course thoroughly familiar with the position of interviewee. The women are Meredith Monk, Lisa Gerrard (Dead Can Dance) and Joan Osborne, who is compared to Janis Joplin — this last is little more than a "how I got into music" interview. Mick Jagger and Billy Bragg are the token Brits.

Ehrlich doesn't aim particularly high — if he can get the subject to ramble on about something spiritual, that'll do nicely. He doesn't engage much, either by pressing the musicians, questioning their assertions, or by drawing on them and lending his own ideas for comparison. Nor does he contextualise: he remarks that Tibetan Buddhism is "trendy", but fails to speculate why. Elsewhere, when writing about Vernon Reid (of Living Colour) he remarks that the church has been seen historically as an instrument of black passivity, a point also made forcefully by the Reverend Run (of Run DMC) — this is a rare example of Ehrlich putting ideas into a social context. Ehrlich's relentlessly middlebrow style makes the book a pleasant amble through the foothills rather than a bracing climb up Mount Spiritual. At times my eyes skated numbly across pages as if reading an in-flight magazine, unanchored by any hard edge, humour or intellectual rigour.

Having said that, Ehrlich does reap some rewards by simply giving his subjects their head. Meredith Monk is beautifully articulate about her work, Allen Ginsberg, getting drunk with his Tibetan guru, is a great storyteller, and Iggy Pop is all-round wonderful, especially about the spiritual experience of seeing Jerry Lee Lewis, a pasty-faced ghost kicking an unplayable piano at a barn dance. "I liked the way that light bounced off his peroxided hair and I liked the way his complexion looked, like it was out of the grave. It gave me a signal, something about that artificiality. I thought, Wow, this person is obviously in another world, and that turned me on."

CLIVE HELL

new notes at a glance

may

information from spnm

new notes, the monthly listings magazine published by spnm, is an essential guide to what's happening in new music.
Events listed in full in **new** notes are summarised on this page

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9 London Sinfonietta
Eisler, HK Gruber**
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11 SE Arts Young Muaicians
Beathoven, Respighi, Brown, Debussy
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12 Forum London
Drysdale, Edwards, Breeze, Livingstone, Andrews, Usher, Taylor, Wolff, Jones, Galloway, Ellis, Burnell,
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13 Sorrel Quartet
Haydn, Firsova, Shostakovich, Smetana
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RPO
Maxwell Davies*** Mozart, Beethoven
BH

14 New London Children's Choir & Composers' Ensemble
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16 Brighton Festival New Music Day
Butler*** Lindberg, Johnson, Ruders, Bolcom, Hayden*** Leach*** Cole*** Williams*** Casken, Anderson, Purnell, Weill
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17 Farewell Songs
Knussen, Turnage, Dean**, Rihm
QEH

18 Bennetts & Bowman
Bousted*** Hodson, O'Neill
St Paul's Hall, University of Huddersfield 01484 472003

Clocka & Clouds
Debussy, Ligeti, Ravel
RFH

19 Alexander Telnikoff et al
Telnikoff, Paganini, JS Bach
CH

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BMIC

20 Philippe Renard
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Tasmin Little Centre, University of Bradford 01274 383191

Clocks & Clouds
Debussy, Ligeti, Stravineky
RFH

21 Raw Goods
Cage, Howitt/Stollery, Lang, Gough, dal Aguila, Howitt/Barber
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22 Seventh Annual Festival of Experimental Music
PR

Junko Urayama
Mozart, Chopin, Hosokawa**, Schumann
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QEH

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PR

24 Seventh Annual Festival of Experimental Music
PR

Kronos Festival
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26 The Debussy Studies Project
Dabussy, Stoneham*, Wilson*** Salter*** Finnissy*, Payne***, Butler, Markham*** Norman*, Skampton*, Anderson*** Barrett*** Toovey***
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27 The Artsong Collective
Stevenson***, various others
CH

Kronos Festival
Partch, Reich
RFH

28 Crossing the Divide: The Younger Generation
Smith**, Knell**, Hesketh*** Liabermann, Finch*** Grant***
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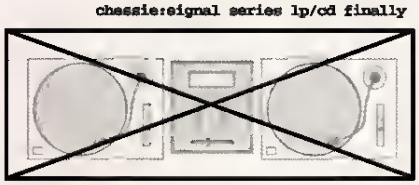
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Bower's internal montage,*Of Mary's Blood*, is a catalyst for the divination of unwanted memories. Thriving upon insecurity, his found sounds, prepared instruments and oblique edits undermine conventional structures. Miraculously relocating the recognisable in the place of the alien, the inclusion of trumpets, guitars and distant voices seems all the more perverse as he and his collaborators revel in misinformation. The skills of this sculptor in shaping abstraction are made glaringly apparent as his monster is painstokingly created. Genuinely moving as opposed to a technically interesting static position, this piece is a spiritual heir to Bryars's *Sinking Of The Titanic*. It bows, scrapes and scratches itself towards a delirious finale. *K Martin The Wire*

Transgression seems to point towards music's pre-secular origins. Bowers' compositions possess the lyrical beauty and the inscrutable mystery evident in the work of 20th century British composers Peter Warlock and John Ireland. Numerous reviewers have emphasised the supposed "dark" nature of Bowers' work but that wouldn't be my interpretation. If we do enter the realm of the Qlipoth it is because such elements need to be integrated within one's consciousness. We are certainly not talking Dark Ambient here. In constructing his spellbinding music Bowers utilises conventional instrumentation in a wonderfully unconventional way, add to this *musique concrete* techniques and deft use of sound processing and what emerges is something very special and undeniably magical in nature. I eagerly await *Eternal Ghosts* the next release in the series. *John Everall The Wire*

The final instalment of Bowers' triptych, Eternal Ghosts continues the process of self-examination which began with the previous intriguing works, but ultimately completes the 'cycle of life',forcing us to confront that single inescapable certainty death itself. This we are challenged to do in the light of our modern moterialistically sophisticated, yet spiritually barren existence. Nowhere is this more potently evoked than in the vocal passage a minute or so into the piece, where the despairing quality of the voice gives the impression of a sout in turmoil, frantically searching for answers that will, ultimately remain undiscovered. Interestingly, this is the antithesis of the ninth to twelfth century plainsong where the quiet tranquility of Gregorian chant was a reflection of a steadfast adherence to spiritual faith. Death was seen merely as a transitionary state leading to eternal life, and, as such, was nothing to be feared. Quasi-religious motifs occur at various points throughout the piece, such as bell-like arpeggios, and what sounds like a segment of the Credo from a Catholic mass. The, by now, familiar Bowers trademarks are all here in abundance including the use of very low synth drones, wildly percussive guitar and some very effective dissonant 'cello playing. However, the overall feel of the piece is conveyed through the use at voices. Whether by employing massively contorted, gutteral moans, banshee wails or relativety clean 'singing' Bowers succeeds again in extending his sonic tendrils into our souls probing and teasing until the shells that have been so carefully built up around our most primitive fears are stripped away, leaving us naked and vulnerable with nothing but the dreadful truth staring us in the face. This really is powerful, thought-provoking material which warrants careful study. Set aside an hour and let Bowers work his magic on you.
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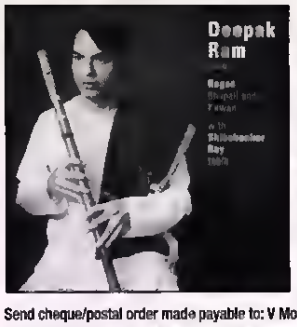
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THE WIRE

epiphanies



Sonic Youth's **Thurston Moore** recalls the night he broke free of his prejudice against bearded Improv. Interview: Biba Kopf

Ever since I have been in situations of doing improvised music, be it solo, duo, trio, ensemble stuff, I am so afraid of people thinking I am some young upstart getting into a scene that already had its own history of development. I don't want people to think I'm infiltrating it just because I have a spurious interest in it before moving onto something else. As it is, I have no interest in playing jazz or any kind of denoted free improvisational standard form of playing, although I now love it and see it and hear it as one of the most mysterious of music histories. It wasn't always the case.

I remember going to John Zorn's place, The Saint, and I would invariably be in this room waiting for a friend of mine, Mark Cunningham [from the New York No Wave group Mars] to come on, getting more and more impatient, because there would be all these bearded men onstage plinking and plunking and doing things with little metal pipes. We were thinking, Let's get the hell out of here, because we really didn't connect with it at all. We certainly weren't looking at it as a wonderful world of music to be involved in. What happened to turn me round? Partly, it happened through jazz appreciation, but mostly it happened through Rudolph Grey.



Rudolph Grey

Rudolph was this really interesting noise guitarist from the 70s. I'd seen him play with The Blue Humans, which was him and Beaver Harris and Arthur Doyle. And I was thinking, Rudolph is really out there as a guitar player, so why is he playing with these old black men screaming jazz? I didn't think, Wow, this is so heavy, he's playing with this alumnus of Coltrane. Because I didn't know anything about jazz, I didn't give it any pedigree. To me, it was like two itinerants banging and screaming on saxophones.

But Rudolph was the one, I wanted to get him back in the picture, because of his association with No Wave, which I was very much involved with — as a witness, at least. He was also connected to Glenn Branca, who I was involved with musically. I had seen him very early on with Glenn at a time before I knew Glenn, when he used to do these amazing pieces for six and 12 guitars in New York loft spaces. One night he did this 12 guitar thing and it was sick, it was incredible, very structured, very powerful. Rudolph was hanging around with his guitar as people were leaving. He went over to Glenn, whispered in his ear, and Glenn shrugged his shoulders, like he was saying, OK, OK. Suddenly, the two of them plugged in their guitars and Glenn started up again. I thought, Oh my God, the orchestra's going into another thing, until Rudolph started playing with him. And what the two of them did was the opposite of the orchestrated, compositional concept that Glenn had shown earlier. It was just free noise, fast double strumming guitars playing, with Rudolph's fingers running all over the neck, and I thought, God, it's really strange that Glenn would put himself in the position of playing this amorphous stuff, a spontaneous blowout. Rudolph was obviously coming from some other world. I was thinking, doesn't he care about constructing something out of what he is doing? Obviously not. He was a loose wire, and the image of Rudolph doing that has always stuck with me.

Years later, I would call him up. We got together and he was telling me you should go and see Charles Gayle, who is a street musician, in the park, so I started going to see Charles Gayle. I asked Byron Coley [writer, who co-runs the Ecstatic Peace and Father Yod labels with Moore] if he could make up some free-music tapes to take with me on a Sonic Youth tour back in the mid-80s. He made up 60! So I was driving the van across country punching in Byron's tapes. It was all so alien to me, I remember thinking, this is the most intriguing and weird music. I really got into researching and finding out about it, wishing I knew it when I was a teenager, instead of just getting into it my thirties.

Then someone gave me a copy of [Peter Brotzmann's] *Machine Gun* and it was all over after that. Even so, I remember when I first heard a Derek Bailey record, I thought this is complete nonsense. Why would anyone want to listen to this? I mean, it's just plinks and plonks for the whole record. Who in their right mind would buy a record like this? What is going on here? What is the give and take here? What is the relationship between the player and the listener? It was obviously a serious record, yet it wasn't absurdist. I couldn't think of it like Nurse With Wound doing something absurdist just to screw with people's perceptions about what a recording is.

So here was this guy, obviously coming out of a serious music background, just doing this flat plinky plonk. Even so, I went to see him play a duo with the drummer Paul Motian — and it was phenomenal. He was one of the best guitar players I had ever seen. It completely opened me up to what he had been into and what he had come out of. It all became apparent that night. I saw this person utilising his whole experience of playing — sound, listening, his demeanour, the way he played with the volume pedal, his sense of dynamics, his sense of simplicity, it was just wonderful. I thought that's the kind of vibe I would love to attain as a musician getting older. And I got lost in it from then on.

I thought Derek's book about improvised music was so great. That was one of the first things I read. He is the least pseudo-intellectual of the whole scene. He balances the intellectualising of what he's doing and the organic/creative thought process of playing it. I am so glad that I discovered that world because it really developed my playing. It completely expanded it. It brought me into contact with a lot of philosophical ideas related to music which existed in that free culture, but not in rock 'n' roll. ☐ *See also Sonic Youth feature, page 26*

PHOTO OF THURSTON MOORE: MAGDA



Skeleton
BW091

A four piece Mashanda band from Zululand that grew from the ashes of a band called MShoza – three members of which were gunned down in one of South Afrika's less publicised atrocities – Skeleton exemplify the philosophy of 'optimism from adversity' The lead singer and drummer, Thamba Ngubane, almost gave up music after the MShoza massacre, but was persuaded by friends such as Professor Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo to persevere Named after their lead guitarist and lucky charm, Musa 'Skeleton' Ngubane (who features on the CD cover), Skeleton represent the *irrepressible* contemporary sound of the townships upbeat and in-your-face, with lyrics explaining the South Afrikan experience often with savage irony, but always with wicked humour. Look out for the Bandulu remixes of Skeleton on 12" EP BWR111-5



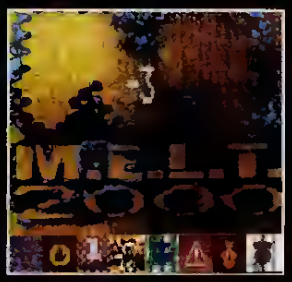
Vusi Khumalo
Follow Your Dream BW093

The solo debut from Vusi Khumalo – who made his name as the drummer on Paul Simon's seminal 'Graceland' – is an album of true South Afrikan soul, featuring performances from a cast of jazz luminaries drawn from South Afrika, Cuba and England According to Vusi, "This music represents a lifetime commitment to the creativity we strive for. Through this music I've explored the various musical cultures that lie within my heart. I composed this music as a contribution to its universal recognition and acceptance.
The responsibility of eternally persevering with the tradition of this music and its ethnic significance." The result is a rich and musically diverse mixture with a strong underlying message of Hope.



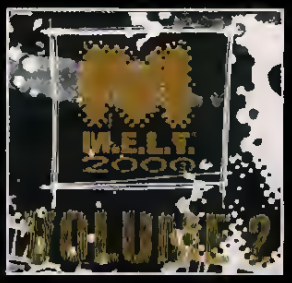
Tribal Ethno Dance
Chapter One: Drum 'n' Metal BW092

Creative Production by Airto Moreira
The first release in a series presenting ethnic music, recorded in the field and the tapes subsequently worked upon in a modern recording studio by contemporary musicians, who add their own styles and feelings As the musical director of this first Tribal Ethno excursion, the shamanic Brazilian percussionist, Airto Moreira, has selected source material from: Dizu & Mzwandile of Amampondo, performing indigenous tribal songs as DZM Projects, Africa's oldest inhabitants, the Khoi-San tribespeople from the Kalahari desert, The Xhosa Singers of Ladyfrere, who are among the last remaining exponents of overtone singing in Africa; and Sangome Saam Hendricks with her band of traditional healers. Tribal Ethno Dance offers a unique musical journey in time, back to the future of rhythm.



M.E.L.T. 2000–3 Music Report
Volume One BW085

This mid-price CD charts the development of M E L T 2000 over its first year, kicking off with Kori'ko Man, the title track of the debut album from Madala Kunene, King of the Zulu guitar, and continuing with the title track from young trumpeter Byron Wallen's album, Fresh Roots. Ambient Afrika is represented by Pops Mohamed and the reflective piano of Moses Molelekwa while two facets of African rhythm are explored by Amampondo and Vusi Khumalo. Also represented are the mesmerising vocalist, Flora Purim, World Jazz drummer, Bruce Wassy; guitarist, Max Lässer; the group, Harmonia, plus otherwise unreleased tracks from Chenjerai, Malu Thobejane, and Robert 'Doc' Mthalane with Madala and Mabu...



M.E.L.T. 2000–3 Music Report
Volume Two BW087

With Volume 2 of the M E L T. sampler series features current and future releases, highlighting remixes such as Spring Heel Jack's deconstruction of the Determinational Meltdown track, 'Hungry On Arrival' and DMP/Cki Factor's reworking of the track they wrote for Flora Purim, 'What We Really See', and indicating the direction the label is taking with our new subsidiary, Electric M E L T., by including a couple of contrasting tracks from Alien Soap Opera. Also included is the seminal slice of organic techno that is 'Conga Fury', a brace of Airto's Creative productions, a taste of the bound-to-be-massive first album from Langiswa, plus tracks from Achisa, Amampondo and Iain Ballamy

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